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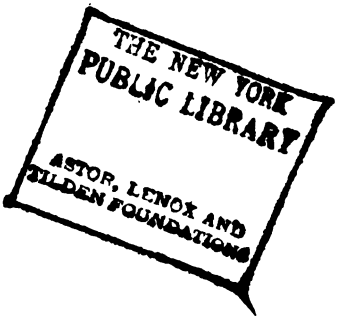
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Cooing softly to himself.

The Von Blumers

BY

TOM MASSON

Author of "A Corner in Women"

ILLUSTRATED BY

BAYARD JONES

In the opinion of the world marriage ends all . . . The truth is precisely the reverse; it begins all

—MAD. SWETCHINE

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THE VON BLUMERS

I

IN WHICH IS LAID DOWN THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE MAN WHO HESITATES IS SOMETIMES WON

ALTHOUGH Swantown was far enough away from the metropolis to be superior to most cosmopolitan influences, it yet boasted a club—situated on Main street, in a Colonial house rejuvenated for the purpose.

Von Blumer, who had telephoned up to Charlotte Caterby that he was going to take her to drive that afternoon, dropped in to get a bite.

Major Buddway, president of the bank, sat at the next table with the owner of the woolen mill. Von Blumer nodded to him, and the Major went on with his talk.

"Yes, sir," said the Major, "girls are not what they used to be. When I was a boy, a

girl was supposed to get up at sunrise and get the breakfast when there was no hired help. She wasn't ashamed to wear an apron in those days. No, sir! She had to make beds and sew and cook and wash, and turn her hand to anything. And, what wives they made! Now look at these delicate things that come up all around us. They talk poor French, dance, dress, and run everybody around 'em in debt. I love a pretty woman, as everybody knows, better than anything on earth. But a woman has her uses. She has it in her power to make a man's home a haven or a hell. Nowadays girls are too much petted and pampered. Too many of them are about as useless as one of Jenkins' notes. They put on a cheap veneer of education, wait for some victim with money, and then lead him a dance all the rest of his life. And this town has as many as any other. I can tell you, if I was a young man, I'd be careful—mighty careful—"

Von Blumer listened to this, and more in the same strain—for the Major apparently was in a pessimistical mood. After he had finished his luncheon he went over to Hen Beebe's livery stable, where the carriage was waiting for him. Hen Beebe had one horse

and carriage that was always let out for the purpose Von Blumer wished it. The carriage was freshly painted, and the horse was thoroughly broken to a loose rein. It was known in the village as the "lovers' rig."

Von Blumer got in and drove on down the street, across the bridge and up the hill to Charlotte Caterby's house—a mansion that commanded an extensive view of the river for several miles.

Charlotte was waiting for him. She had on a simple white gown with an India silk dust coat, and a Panama hat with red roses in it. Von Blumer vowed to himself that she was stunning.

They drove off along the river road and then to the left along the foothills. The reins began to slacken. Jerry, the horse, who was a confirmed matchmaker, settled down to his regular business. Von Blumer put his arm around Charlotte's waist. Then there was a peculiar sound which would have made some horses increase their pace. But this particular animal had wisely learned to discriminate. It was by subtle characteristics like this that he had risen to distinction in his profession.

"Say, dear," said Von Blumer, "I love you

so much I never can tell you *how* much. What a wife you will make! I'm so proud of you. If you could only have heard what Major Buddway was saying at the club, well, I guess it would have made you mad—for your sex—or sad, anyway—that is, if it's true."

"What did the Major say?"

"Oh, he went on at a great rate about the girls of to-day; said they couldn't do anything practical—couldn't cook, sew, and all that."

Charlotte sighed.

"I suppose it's true," she said.

"Well, maybe it is about most of 'em, but I know it isn't about you. You're just the right kind."

He gave her a little squeeze.

"Why, Henry, how do you know that? You've never really seen me do anything."

"That doesn't matter. I just know you are—of course."

"But, Henry, I'm not. I'm selfish and extravagant, and I've never done any household work—really, it's true. Why, if you knew how incapable I was you wouldn't dream of marrying me—sometimes I feel real guilty about it."

Von Blumer laughed.

"I don't believe it," he said. "That's only your way of putting it."

"Well, I don't like to think about it—let's change the subject."

They talked of other things—and, indeed, there were long intervals in which they never talked at all. Finally, however, the ride was over. At five o'clock Von Blumer came out of the Caterby house, and walking down the path through the gate, proceeded to unhitch the horse, who had been patiently waiting while he said *au revoir* to Charlotte.

There was a preoccupied look on Von Blumer's face. Perhaps the Major's statement, and Charlotte's confirmation of it, even though self-deprecatory remarks are usually made to restore confidence, had set him thinking.

Harold Caterby, Charlotte's younger brother, was sitting on the fence, whittling.

"Where you been?" he asked.

"Out for a little ride."

"Huh! Sister promised to play croquet with me."

"Well, I guess it was my fault, Harold. I telephoned up."

"She might have kept her promise all the same."

"Ride down to the stable with me?"

Harold jumped off the fence instantly.

"All right!" he cried, and got in.

As the horse jogged along down the dirt road leading into Main street there was a brief silence. Jerry was in a slight hurry to get back. He felt that he had done his duty by all concerned, and it was now time for him to get what was coming to him at Hen Beebe's. Von Blumer had to check him up.

"Say, Harold," he said, turning suddenly to the boy, "I want to ask you a question."

"All right."

"Can your sister cook?"

Harold's nose went straight up in the air.

"I should say she couldn't!" he exclaimed. "I don't think she ever tried to learn. Mama says when *she* was a girl that she had to."

"Just between you and me, Harold—is she extravagant?"

"Is she! Oh, my, yes indeed! She never has any money. She never does seem to like to lend me any."

Harold's face became suddenly dark as the recollection of the way his sister had treated him grew on him afresh.

"I tell you," he said, "Charlotte's a mean old thing. She's selfish, 'nd Injun-givin', 'nd—everything!"

Von Blumer began to get mad also—but in a different way. He had got more than he bargained for.

"Look here, young man," he said, "be careful. Don't you talk about your sister that way. I won't have it!"

"Well, I don't care," said Harold, sullenly. "She didn't treat me right."

"Well, never mind. Forget it."

Von Blumer threw the reins to Hen Beebe, who was lolling in front of his stable, and strolled across the street with Harold at his side.

The bank was just across the street from Beebe's, and although it was long past closing time, Major Buddway sat in the open window enjoying a cigar, the smoke of which eddied and floated off over the little grass plot in front of the bank.

"I'm going in here," said Von Blumer to Harold. "You can run back home. Good-bye."

Von Blumer dropped in and sat down opposite Major Buddway.

"Nice weather we're having, Major," he said, opening up the conversation.

"Never better—and this is the best part of the day, too. Rush is over, and there's time to think."

The rush in Swantown during banking hours consisted of between fifty and seventy-five deposits, which the teller took care of while the Major sat in his back office, "chinned" with the farmers, refused loans, dickered over interest charges, and—smoked. In one week the Major probably did as much solid work as a city official does in two hours.

"I was listening to what you had to say at lunch to-day," said Von Blumer.

"Oh, did you?—about girls—well, I didn't mean to talk so loud—hope you didn't think I meant anything personal."

"Oh, no. But did you really mean it?"

The Major began to swell up. His heart was in his subject.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I did mean it. I declare to you I don't know what the world's coming to. I was down in New York the other day, eating my dinner in one of those new-fangled palm rooms. Well, sir, it was a shame to see women sitting around eating

and drinking. They had on paint and powder and all kinds of didoes, and as for hair—well, it was all the colors they could make it, except the real thing. I tell you these young girls of ours are all being brought up wrong. They see that sort of thing and it turns their heads. I hate a useless woman above all things on earth. They can be as good-looking as possible, but they must be able to do things."

"Don't you think, Major, there are some girls in Swantown that are—all right?"

Buddway puffed his cigar slowly and looked keenly at his friend. He was up on phiz-ology. He knew exactly what Von Blumer meant and why he had dropped in. He knew Von Blumer was badly in love—everybody knew that.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I'll tell you about that. There's heaps of girls that are all right; I suppose, even now—in spite of the tendency the other way. And I guess some of them, as like's not, are located right here. Were you thinking of getting married?"

"Well, I had some idea about it."

"I thought perhaps you had."

There was a pause. The Major chewed his cigar reflectively.

"Know what I'd do if I was in your place?"

"No. What?"

"Well, sir, if there's one thing I'm strong on, it's home cooking. I believe in it thoroughly. It's a hobby of mine. Now, you take an egg. There isn't one person in ten, nowadays, that can cook one. They'll slap it into boiling hot water for three minutes, or three and a half, and then slap it out again—the outside harder than a brickbat and the inside not done. You've got to coddle an egg to cook it right. Give it an even chance all the way through. It's the same thing with bread and meat—and game. Dear me! No one knows how to cook birds nowadays. They're in too much of a hurry. And as for these young girls—who ever tried to teach 'em? Now, young man, take my advice. Marry a girl that can cook, and that won't spend all your money for you. It will pay in the end."

"But how in the world am I going to find out?"

The Major smiled.

"Well, sir, if I was in your place, I'd do something like this. Haven't you got some sort of a hiding-place off there in the hills—over at Shag's Neck?"

"Yes—a small camp."

"Camp—huh! It's more like a joss house. When I was young we camped in the woods anywhere, and slept on the ground, in blankets. Now they have painted and varnished affairs they call a camp. Jim Starkey cooks for you out there in summer, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Jim's a pretty good cook. I've had him. Well, you get the young lady to go out with you some day, picnicking—have Starkey fail you at the last minute, understand—and then you just make the girl do the cooking. Have everything ready for her, and insist upon it. Then you'll see what she can do. See if she can make light biscuits and batter cakes. See if she knows when a steak's done and how to boil a potato. You can tell. Then, again, make her a present—give her her choice of two things, one of 'em worth about twice as much as the other, and see which one she takes. That's a good test. If she fails you in both of these —keep off. Keep off, I say!"

Von Blumer rose.

"Well," he said, "I guess, Major, you're about right. I must be going. It's time to trundle home."

A few days later Von Blumer took Charotte out in Beebe's buggy again. And as they wound slowly over the same road they had gone before he waved his hand to the distant hills.

"Charlotte," he said, "your birthday is tomorrow, and I want you and the family to come out and take dinner with me. I will get Starkey to cook for us."

"All right," said Charlotte. "I'm sure we shall enjoy it very much."

Von Blumer, the day before, had been in to Sam Stilton's, the local jeweler, and picked out two ornaments. One of them was a pearl crescent, which Stilton valued at $50. The other was a diamond pendant, with a tiny neck chain. The price was $125. It was quite evident, even to an unpracticed eye, which was the more expensive of the two. Von Blumer now drew them from his pocket.

"Dearest," he said, as Jerry almost stopped, "I wanted to get you something for your birthday, but I wasn't quite sure just what would please you. I want you to look these over and tell me which you really prefer."

He handed her the boxes.

Charlotte trembled with delight.

"Oh, Henry!" she exclaimed, as she looked alternately at the two ornaments.

"Perhaps you don't care for either of them," he said. "If not, they can be changed. I told Sam Stilton I'd let him know."

Charlotte's eyes wandered from one to the other.

"I don't think you ought to give me either," she said, at last. "It's too much."

"Nonsense!"

"But, Henry! Can we afford it?"

"Certainly."

"They are lovely, of course, but——"

"Now, dear, don't hesitate. Take the one you like."

"Well, then, I'll take the pearls. They are so lovely and simple."

"Wouldn't you rather have the other?"

Charlotte hesitated for a moment—while she struggled with herself.

"Oh, no," she said at last, decisively, "the pearls!"

Von Blumer turned red; but he preserved his composure. Then occurred another sound similar to the one on the previous ride. But the wise horse never moved.

The next day they all started for the camp in a carryall.

They arrived at that secluded structure at eleven. Von Blumer busied himself with the things that had been sent out early in the morning, while Charlotte, her mother and Harold made themselves at home.

In half an hour the host entered the front room, hung with deer-heads and old prints.

"Bad news," he said, briefly.

"Don't tell us," said Charlotte, "that the things are not all here."

"Oh, yes—everything is here—except Starkey. He hasn't shown up. He was to do the cooking—he always does for me. I don't know much about it myself."

He turned to Charlotte.

"Would it be imposing upon you to ask if you can help us out?"

Mrs. Caterby looked at her daughter hopelessly.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that Charlotte doesn't know—I——"

"What!" exclaimed Von Blumer. "Ask you to do anything? Never!"

Charlotte rose. She had already begun to roll up her sleeves.

"Certainly not!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll cook the dinner. You show me where everything is," she added, as she brushed by her amazed mother and passed through into the camp kitchen.

One hour and thirty minutes later they all gathered round. Charlotte, in the intervals of watching the oven and the fire, had managed to set the table.

The only silent one was Harold. He was too busy to talk.

"These biscuits," said Mrs. Caterby, "are delicious. I didn't know, Charlotte, that you could make them."

Charlotte looked at her mother warningly.

"And this steak," said Von Blumer, "is by far the best I ever ate."

Nothing was lacking. The vegetables were perfectly seasoned. The batter cakes were done to a turn. Von Blumer finished his meal in a daze. After it was over he motioned to Charlotte.

"Let's take a walk," he whispered. They passed out into the unbroken forest, tracking last year's dead leaves with their feet. Only a chattering squirrel viewed them suspiciously from a distant chestnut tree.

Finally the penitent young lover turned, deep contrition in his voice.

"Darling," he said, "that was by far the best dinner I ever ate. And now I have a confession to make."

"A confession!"

"Yes. I have deceived you; and the worst of it is, it was all due to a contemptible suspicion I entertained."

"A suspicion! Of whom?"

"Of you. I may as well make a clean breast of it. The other day I heard Major Buddway inveighing against the hopeless ignorance of all young girls nowadays, and their unfitness for married life; and right on the top of that Harold told me you couldn't do anything; after which I had an interview with the Major on the subject, and he advised me—well, he said in substance that he would make sure if the girl could cook before I married her, and so I played a base trick on you. I got Starkey to stay away, and I made you cook the dinner just to test you. Can you ever forgive me?"

Charlotte smiled.

"It was pretty bad," she said. "And you ought to have trusted me. At the same time

I think Major Buddway *is* right. I can assure you that it never came home to me so much as recently."

Then she turned to him with a mischievous look in her eyes.

"I, also," she said, "have a confession to make to you."

"What can it be?"

"Simply this. Harold was awfully angry with me the other day because I went off with you, and didn't play croquet with him, and he said some mean things about me to you. Well, afterwards he was sorry he had said them, and when he came home he told me all about it. Why, it seems that he hid under the bank window while you and Major Buddway were talking, and he heard what you said, and I got it all out of him somehow—for underneath he is loyal to his sister. Of course, I had to rise to the emergency. And so for the past week I have been surreptitiously cooking in the kitchen, and reading half the night all the cook books I could get hold of. I really didn't know anything about it. I was selfish, and lazy, and unfit for housework. But I have learned *something!*"

Von Blumer threw his arms around her.

"You've learned enough," he cried. "Only say that you'll forgive me."

Charlotte looked at him anxiously.

"Only on one condition," she whispered.

"Granted. What is it?"

"That you will let me change that pearl pin for that diamond pendant."

II

IN WHICH THE IDEA OF A SIMPLE WEDDING IS FULLY DISCUSSED AND AGREED UPON

"I SUPPOSE, dearest," said Von Blumer, about three weeks later, when they were out one afternoon in Hen Beebe's rig, "that we ought to talk about the wedding and the day."

"Yes," said Charlotte, "I suppose we must."

"*Must!* Why, don't you want to? Anyone would think it was something disagreeable that was going to happen."

"Well, you know, dear, there is so much to be done. I've got to go to town—oh, lots of times—to get fitted, and then all the other things!"

Von Blumer dropped the reins momentarily and looked somewhat fearfully at his prospective bride. "Don't you think, dear," he said, "that we'd better have a simple wedding?"

"Oh, certainly. That was my idea—no fuss."

"Good! That's my idea. Why, I can get ready for it in a couple of hours. No trouble at all. You set the time, make a date with the parson, put on your best clothes, answer 'I will' enough times to make it all right, jump into a carriage, and we're off!"

Charlotte's face wore a slightly troubled expression. "Of course, dear," she replied, "that's all right from your standpoint, but we'll have to do a little more than that."

"Oh, of course. I suppose a little spread?"

"A breakfast."

Von Blumer gazed at her suspiciously.

"You mean a regular wedding breakfast?" he said; "one of those awful things that takes place in the afternoon, where there is everything to eat that you never have for breakfast at any other time? Spare me!"

"Well, we'll see."

"I suppose we'll have a few flowers?"

"Oh, yes, a few simple little flowers."

"Good. The simpler the better. And where shall it be?"

"You mean at home or in church?"

Von Blumer grew thoughtful. "By Jove,"

he said, "it's a terrible thing to have happen anywhere, isn't it? I can feel myself growing cold already, and shaky in the knees. Let's run away and get rid of the whole thing. We can stop at the first parsonage, where no one knows us, and be married in two minutes, with no fuss at all, no anxiety, no notices in the papers, no congratulations, no relatives, nothing but peace and quiet, and at the minimum expense."

Charlotte drew herself up haughtily until even the old horse pricked up his ears as he felt the sudden cold wave. His ears had a way of reproachfully asserting themselves when the course of true love was not running smooth.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "The idea of your saying it's a terrible thing! Now I won't marry you at all. Drive me home at once. You needn't flatter yourself, anyway. I can assure you that no matter what kind of a wedding *might* have happened, *you* wouldn't be noticed. You may be sure of that!"

Von Blumer sighed.

"Darling," he said brokenly, "forgive me. I didn't mean it. I was wrong. Of course it will be the grandest, happiest day of my life. I can't wait. Don't mind what I say. Have any kind of a wedding you want. Hire a caterer

from town if you like. Invite everybody you ever knew. Have it in two churches. Get a brass band. I can stand it, I guess. I'll nerve myself up to it. I'll do it if it kills me!"

"You won't! For I simply won't marry you, that's all. I wouldn't marry you for worlds. No, not for worlds. Take me home."

Her lover looked at her helplessly. He was beginning to get a little angry himself. For it must be confessed that Von Blumer had a temper and a substratum of old New England pride.

"Well," he exclaimed, "if that doesn't beat anything I ever heard! First I suggest that we have the simplest kind of wedding—I do it for your sake as well as my own. But you don't like the idea. Then, to please you, and entirely sacrificing my own personal feelings, I go to the other extreme and tell you to have as much fuss as you like. But that doesn't please you either."

Charlotte's eyes blazed.

"Why should you interfere?" she exclaimed. "It isn't your wedding."

"It isn't? Then whose is it? Perhaps you intend to marry some one else."

"I certainly don't intend to marry you. But

He picked up the whip and did what he had never done before.

if I did it wouldn't be your wedding. You would have nothing to do with it. Doesn't papa pay the bills?"

Von Blumer snatched up the loose reins. He picked up the whip and did what he had never done before—he gave Jerry a sharp cut over the haunches. That hurt and bewildered animal, stung to the quick, both in his feelings and his back, reared up and started off down the road at a gallop.

Von Blumer was furious.

"All right," he exclaimed as Jerry slowly quieted down. "All right. That settles it, so far as I'm concerned. I wouldn't marry you now under any circumstances. The idea! Papa pay the bills! Well, he can pay the bills for your wedding, but not for mine. I want you to understand that I wouldn't take a red cent from any man living for all the swell weddings in the world. I'll take you home, and we'll never see each other again. Get up there, Jerry, you old fool!"

Charlotte did not reply. There was a frightened look on her face. Thus they drove on swiftly for some time, Von Blumer continuing to urge Jerry along.

Suddenly she put her hand on his arm.

The reins slackened.

"I didn't mean it," she whispered. "It was horrid of me to say that. Will—you—forgive —me?"

The reins slipped down over the dashboard. Jerry suddenly grew normal.

Von Blumer's arm stole around Charlotte's waist.

"Please forgive *me,* dearest," he said. "It was all my fault. Do just as you please about it all. I don't care. I simply couldn't live without you."

"And I can have any kind of wedding I want?"

"Certainly, darling. I leave it entirely with you."

Charlotte's eyes glistened.

"Then," she said, "I'm really going to have a simple wedding."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes—yes—of course there will be a few necessary things."

"Oh, of course. I understand that."

"But nothing elaborate."

"Splendid! You're a darling! Will there be any—ushers?"

Charlotte thought.

"Well, perhaps, dear," she said, "it might be well to have—say four."

"Then it will be in the church?"

"Yes, I thought so. It seems more—oh, I don't know—more——"

Von Blumer laughed.

"More binding. Never fear, you won't get away from me. All right—in the church" (mum). "Anything you say. It's all right. I love you" (mum)—"couldn't live without you" (mum)—"you're a darling" (mum, mum).

They were a little later than usual in getting home that day, and by the time Von Blumer had put up the rig and started out of Hen Beebe's stable it was nearly dusk.

Major Buddway, as usual, sat in the bank window, smoking.

"Hello, Henry!" the Major called out. "Come over and join me. Been sparking?"

Von Blumer turned red.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said, as he sat down next to the Major.

"I heard you were going to step off, and I want to congratulate you. Known Charlotte Caterby ever since she was a baby. She's a nice girl. Little bit spoiled, but she'll get over that all right. When is the wedding to be?"

"Two weeks from to-day."

The Major settled back.

"Well," he said, "it's a good thing to have a wedding once in a while in a town like this. Stimulates trade, gets people out, creates some excitement; it's better in this respect than a funeral. Of course, it's a matter of preference as to which you would rather attend. Old Mrs. Si Conklin, who lives next to me, has a leaning towards funerals. She hasn't missed a funeral in this section for thirty years. I really believe it's the only thing that keeps her alive. As for me, I prefer a wedding every time. Both of 'em have about the same ingredients—a parson, flowers, church, chief mourners, all the livery hacks in town, and a long trip afterwards. But with a funeral it can't be done over again. You can't make a test case out of it, and back out if you don't like it and begin all over, as you can with a wedding. You've got to be satisfied and settle down to it and take what comes just as if you really deserved it. A wedding has possibilities; it opens up a big field. Look at old Dick Hayden, down on the River Bend. He's been married six times, and says he's just beginning to get some fun out of life."

"I hope I won't have to wait that long," said Von Blumer.

"Well, you never can tell. Sometimes you strike it right the first time, and sometimes you have to keep on trying until you're fairly discouraged. I remember Dick Hayden's third wife. She almost ruined him. Why, after she died, he had to take the Keeley cure before any one would have him again. You're going to have a real swell, bang-up wedding, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. It's going to be very simple—just as simple as we can make it."

The Major straightened up.

"Who told you so?" he said.

"Why, Charlotte, of course."

"And you believed her?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

The Major relighted his cigar deliberately and put his feet out of the window.

"You've got a great deal to learn," he said, "and just remember one thing: that when the girl you marry tells you the wedding is going to be simple, don't you believe her. Just prepare yourself for the worst that can happen, even to fireworks. Don't fool yourself. Of course, if a woman gets into the habit of mar-

rying, why, after a while, she kind of settles down into a matrimonial jog-trot, and she is satisfied with almost any way that's convincing. But the first time a girl like Charlotte Caterby steps off nothing is too good for her. Don't you build up any false hopes."

"You really think so?"

"I know it. Haven't I seen her going back and forth from town? But don't you be worried. No one will notice *you*. You'll be the smallest thing in the whole affair."

"Well," said Von Blumer, rising, "I'm much obliged, Major, for what you've told me. I suppose it's inevitable, but at any rate I've been warned."

They shook hands solemnly in the gathering gloom, and Von Blumer went off to get his dinner, thinking deeply.

III

IN WHICH THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM

MR. CATERBY, Charlotte's father, was the owner of a large factory on the outskirts of Swantown. Although a man of some wealth, and one of Swantown's leading citizens, he was exceedingly democratic in his tastes.

Von Blumer, young and inexperienced as he was, and believing, in spite of what Major Buddway had said, that a simple wedding was an easy matter, felt that the psychological moment had arrived when it was as well for him to exchange views with Mr. Caterby.

He had no doubt of the result.

The next morning he drove over to that gentleman's factory. Mr. Caterby was seated in his private office, dictating to a stenographer.

"Ah, Henry, good-morning. Want to see me?"

"Yes, sir."

The door closed behind the stenographer and the two men faced each other. Von Blumer wasted no time.

"Has Charlotte said anything to you about what kind of a wedding she is to have?" he asked.

"Nothing special. But I suppose she will have to have what she wants. She and her mother are bossing the job."

"What's your idea about it?"

"My idea is that it's going to cost me a couple of thousand, and I wish it wasn't. Of course, Henry, I don't want to be mean. A girl isn't married very often, and she ought to have things to suit her when she is. At the same time, it's all wrong to go to a lot of needless expense. Henry, we're living in an extravagant age. I've known you long enough to speak frankly, and, to be plain, there are times when I resent it."

"So do I."

Caterby drummed his fingers on the desk.

"My boy," he said, "I knew you would feel the same about it. But we can't help ourselves.

I guess we'll have to submit. When Charlotte and her mother both combine, there isn't much hope."

Von Blumer smiled triumphantly.

"Let *me* tell you something," he said. "Charlotte and I had a little dispute about this matter, and I asserted myself."

"Asserted yourself!"

"Yes. I saw she was bound to have an elaborate wedding, and I headed her off."

"You did?"

"Yes. Now, you may feel this isn't so—that such a thing is impossible. But I got her to consent to a simple affair—that is, as simple as we can naturally have. Of course, it will have to be in church, and I suppose I'll have to get some ushers. But she's just in the mood to do exactly what I say, and I feel sure, if you stand by me, that between us we can keep this thing down to a plain, inexpensive affair. You see, I'm considering your interests. Yesterday, after my talk with Charlotte I didn't even feel that it was necessary to say anything to you, so convinced was I that she understood it all and had made up her mind to have a simple wedding. But—well, since last night I've changed my mind, and thought perhaps, after all, I'd

better see you and make a sure thing. With both of us standing firm together, I feel that the ladies will only have just what is absolutely necessary. I'm glad that you agree with me. An elaborate affair is a nuisance."

Caterby slapped his hand on his knee.

"It's worse than that," he exclaimed. "It's a d—d nuisance. Good for you! Charlotte will be glad afterwards that we didn't let her do it. Splendid! No frills—just a plain, simple affair."

He held out his hand cordially.

"My boy," he said, "I'm with you heart and soul. You're a brick! To be candid with you, I didn't want to spend as much money as I was afraid I would have to. Of course, I was willing to do the square thing by all concerned. But it seemed to me foolish to have anything so elaborate as I feared. It's a great relief."

Von Blumer left the presence of his future father-in-law with a light heart. He said to himself that everything had been arranged. His natural hatred of all ostentation would not have any occasion to be aroused by what was by far the most important event in his life.

But by the end of the third day certain suspicious circumstances came to his notice.

Sam Tucker, the local florist, met him with a smiling face and said he had had to order two new step ladders to reach certain high places in the church.

"Christmas ain't in it with this affair o' yourn," he chuckled.

Von Blumer noticed that Hen Beebe had all his hacks and carriages out in the back yard of his stable, and was going over them with a paint brush.

The following preliminary notice appeared in the *Valley Advertiser,* in the Swantown column:

> "Invitations are out for the Von Blumer-Caterby wedding, and ye scribe opines that it will eclipse all the other social functions of the season in brilliancy and éclat. Over six hundred invitations have been issued, and the name on them of the celebrated Biffany, of New York, is a guarantee of their selectness. It is understood that the wedding dress will be of pearl gray satin, made in ye metropolis, relieved by old lace that has been cherished in the family for generations, and the train is said to be nearly five feet long.

The bride's brother will act as page. It is going to be a grand affair all right, and the contracting parties have our heartiest congratulations."

Over six hundred invitations! Von Blumer wondered what it all meant.

For days Charlotte had been practically invisible. Hurried trips to town, interspersed with long interviews with local tradespeople, had made it impossible for Von Blumer to catch her alone.

Von Blumer himself was also busy. There were certain necessary things for him to do.

He made arrangements with his old friend and classmate, Jim Castleton, to be his best man. He selected his ushers. He was fitted for certain necessary garments.

When he read the notice, however, he lost no time in hunting up Mr. Caterby. To his surprise, he found it much more difficult to see that gentleman than he dreamed of.

At the factory Mr. Caterby was engaged in an important conference. If Von Blumer tried to get him at the club he had just gone home, and inquiries at home developed the fact that he had just gone to his club.

"Can it be possible," said Von Blumer to himself, "that he is avoiding me?"

While he was asking himself this distressing question a kindly hand was laid on his shoulder.

It was Major Buddway.

"Well, my boy, what did I tell you? I see that affair of yours is in full swing. Going to be a great thing for Swantown. Everybody is working. They say a California garden isn't going to be a circumstance to the inside of the church. I told you you couldn't stop it."

Von Blumer drew his friend into the bank building. He hadn't been able to confide in anyone for so long that he was almost maudlin in his desire for human sympathy.

"Look here, Major," he said, "I thought I had the whole thing fixed. It was all going to be so simple. Charlotte agreed with me—she was even enthusiastic about it. But to make the whole matter certain, I talked it over with her father, and he coincided with me perfectly. He even seemed to be grateful to think by my efforts I was trying to save him money. And now the whole thing seems to be going the other way. I can't even get any explanations. Mr. Caterby avoids me. Charlotte is surrounded by dressmakers and rela-

tives. She waves me away. I'm practically an outsider."

The Major smiled grimly.

"My son," he said, "let me give you a piece of advice. Don't you know that it's easier to stop a panic in Wall Street than it is the minds of two women set on a wedding? Now, don't do it. And, what's more, don't be grumpy, because you can't. You fall in line."

"Fall in line?"

"Yes, sir. Show 'em you're somebody yourself. Put on all the lugs you've got, even if it kills you. You might as well."

Von Blumer looked thoughtfully out through the door over across the way to Hen Beebe's place, where that enterprising gentleman was busily engaged in trimming up Jerry—a process that had not been gone through with since the new bell was put in the belfry of the Baptist Church.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed at last. "Simplicity be hanged! I'll be as elaborate and swell as any of 'em. I'll enter into the spirit of the whole affair. Major, you're a brick!"

The bachelors' supper that Von Blumer gave

three evenings later in the club house is still referred to as one of the chief historic events in the annals of Swantown.

It must be confessed, however, that the chronicle of what happened after this interesting event, up to the time the happy couple found themselves on a western-bound train, only Von Blumer can tell, and he himself admits that it has been but imperfectly preserved in his mind. In speaking of it afterwards he said:

"I was vaguely conscious all the time that I was the chief actor in a pageant in which no one was paying the slightest attention to me. Personally, the whole affair was of so much importance that I was overwhelmed in it, and I seemed to stand apart from myself. I floated in a sea of upturned faces, the unobserved of all observers. Some kind friend, apparently the only one who saw me at all, afterwards told me that as I stood at the altar my knees knocked together. But I was not aware of it. My principal longing through it all was to get away. I wanted to escape. The only thing I really remember was that when, full of champagne and salad and covered with rice, I came to myself in the Pullman car, I recalled

the horrible fact that I had forgotten to pay the parson."

What Von Blumer failed to recollect, however, was fully set forth by the local correspondent of the *Valley Advertiser,* whose account much curtailed, was as follows:

> "No more brilliant social affair has ever taken place in our midst than the Von Blumer-Caterby wedding, which came off on time in the Congregational Church last Thursday. * * * All the élite of Swantown were present, including a number from New York. Nothing could have been more beautiful than the bride as she swept up the aisle on the arm of Swantown's leading citizen, viz., her father. She wore * * * Also, a magnificent diamond ornament, the gift of the groom, sparkled on the bosom of the bride." Etc., etc., etc.

One other slight incident, apparently trivial in itself, and yet of some human interest, remains to be told of this interesting event. In honor of the bride and groom, whose debt to him was thus publicly acknowledged, Hen Beebe's horse Jerry had been decorated with a

wreath of orange blossoms. And it is recorded of him that as he went back to the stable and, poking his nose out of the rear window, saw the train that carried the happy pair move away, he whinnied at them mournfully, as if to announce to all that those whom he had guarded so carefully and well had now gone out of his life forever. Jerry's occupation was gone.

IV

IN WHICH A RAILROAD COMPANY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DOWNFALL OF A HERO

AS the wedding trip gradually came to an end, one thing was quite certain—nothing was too good for Von Blumer.

He spent money like water. The impetus he received from Major Buddway's advice carried him on for two weeks, until (to be precise) nine-thirty o'clock on the morning of the last day of their trip.

At this moment Von Blumer bethought himself to count the cost. He discovered, to his dismay, that he had the sum total of six dollars and eighty-nine cents.

This would be enough, said Von Blumer to himself, allowing for two moderate luncheons, two moderate dinners, the incidentals and the cab fare to the hotel in New York, where he could communicate with home resources.

Nevertheless, he came back from the smoking-compartment to the presence of his bride somewhat sobered by his discovery.

He looked at her curiously. "Darling," he whispered just above the noise of the train, not to be overheard, "we've had a splendid time, and now that we're going back I want to ask you a question—a question I have avoided—well, until I partly recovered consciousness from one of the most heavenly times of my life."

"What is it?" asked the new Mrs. Von Blumer.

"You agreed with me the last time I saw you alone before we were married that we would have a real simple wedding. You remember we had—well, a little quarrel about it. But it ended by your saying that you certainly wanted a simple wedding, and I supposed that was what we would have. Why did you change your mind?"

Mrs. Von Blumer tossed her head.

"I didn't change my mind, dear," she said; "I still feel exactly as I did then. I didn't want papa to do all that; but, but—well, he insisted upon it."

"He—he insisted upon it? Impossible!"

"But he did. And then you, too, made it hard for me."

"I——"

"Yes. Didn't you do all you could to make it an elaborate affair?"

"Yes; but only after I saw it couldn't be helped. But your father! To think that he——"

Mrs. Von Blumer drew forth an envelope.

"Here's a letter I got from papa to-day," she said. "The last paragraph may interest you. I meant to have shown it to you before."

Von Blumer read as follows:

"P. S.—Tell Henry it was all my fault. I know both of you really desired a more simple wedding, but I couldn't help it. I got interested in the preparations, and then made up my mind it must be a buster. And it was, wasn't it? But I wanted you to have it, Charlotte, and I don't regret it one bit.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE DADDY."

Von Blumer laughed.

"And so," he said, "it was all his fault. Well, we can both forgive him, I guess."

It was at this moment that the conductor came through.

"Are these your tickets?"

"Yes," said Von Blumer, examining them.

"They are not good," said the conductor.

"What's the matter with them?"

"They are not stamped."

"That's not my fault. If the ticket agent failed to stamp them it's the company's negligence."

"I can't help that, sir. You will either have to pay your fare to New York or get off at the next station. Those are my orders."

With the consciousness of the fact that he had but $6.89 in his pocket, suddenly confronted by this wholly unforeseen dilemma, Von Blumer's pulse promptly rose to thirty points above par and his heart sank correspondingly.

It was necessary for him, however, to assume a bold front. The passengers were becoming interested, and Mrs. Von Blumer's indignant glance at the conductor, and her confident glance at him, made this imperative. If there is a time in his life when the average man's courage must be intact it is when he is first married. Afterward, by gradual transitions,

it may sink to a normal standard, but on his wedding trip a hero he must be. It's an opportunity that comes so seldom that to take advantage of it is a sacred duty.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," he said with a rising voice.

"Do pay him, dear," said Mrs. Von Blumer, laying her hand appealingly on his arm. "You can make them pay you back, I'm sure, when the facts are ascertained."

"Certainly," said the conductor. "The company will wire on to the agent at Cleveland and your money will be refunded. I have no doubt, of course, that it's all right, but I have no authority to act and it would cost me my job to accept these tickets."

Von Blumer looked up and down at the line of faces, and promptly rose to his feet.

"No, sir," he shouted. "Give me back those tickets, and put us off, and be hanged to you! I can stand it if you can. This company will have the prettiest suit on its hands it has had in a long time."

At this point the man in the next section spoke. "I admire your pluck, sir, and I believe you have a good case. But it isn't necessary for you to leave the train. Pay your fare over

again, keep the tickets, and I shall be glad to be a witness to the transaction. I have suffered myself at the hands of this company." And he handed out his card.

"Do," pleaded Mrs. Von Blumer.

"Never!" replied her indignant husband. "You are very kind, sir, but I'm going to make a sure thing of it. I'm longing to be put off of this train at the next station, and I'm going to be."

Thus it happened that, in spite of every persuasion and entreaty, an excited groom and a despondent bride stood on the platform at Buffalo and saw their train roll out of the station.

"Oh, dear," said Charlotte, as she sank back into a seat in the waiting-room, "this is dreadful! Why did you do it? And what are you going to do about it now?"

"Do!" exclaimed Von Blumer. "The first thing I'm going to do is to telegraph on to the office for money."

"Money!"

Von Blumer smiled feebly. He led his puzzled bride over to a far corner, where he could break the sad news undisturbed.

"Yes, dear," he said. "I may as well confess. The fact is that on this trip I threw all

my native caution and simplicity to the winds, and I have barely enough money left to get home with, even if we had stayed on the train and the tickets were accepted."

His bride looked at him rather hopelessly for a moment, and then her face flushed with surprise.

"My dear," she said, "why in the world didn't you whisper—do something—ask me? It seemed *quite* unnecessary for me to tell you, but before we left, papa was thoughtful enough to put a hundred-dollar bill in my purse."

Von Blumer's face relaxed. There came into his tired eye that sudden gleam of joy that a man feels when for the first time his wife comes to his rescue.

"Well, dearest," he said, smiling at her as well as he could through the gloom of the Buffalo station, "I didn't suppose, after that wedding, your father had *anything* left."

"He told me," replied Mrs. Von Blumer, "that it was all he did have left out of four thousand dollars."

V

IN WHICH THE MANNER OF TELLING A THING IS SHOWN TO BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE THING ITSELF.

"MY dear, I have some good news for you!"

It was three months after their honeymoon, and Von Blumer, who had just returned from New York, was sitting on the piazza of their house in Swantown—a house they had rented temporarily, as Von Blumer had "prospects" that might call him away at any time.

"It's some horrid business, I know," said Mrs. Von Blumer. "I don't want to hear anything about it. You don't think of anything else, anyway."

"Well, that's a real pleasant thing for you to say; isn't it? Do you realize that it's all for you?"

"Well, I don't care! It takes you away from

me. Every time you go to New York on these horrid trips, it makes me so cross."

She came over and put her arms around him.

"I want you all to myself," she said.

"And you shall have me," replied Von Blumer, with a fierce hug; "even if we have to go to New York to live. How would you like that?"

"I might. What is your news?"

"Oh, nothing special."

"All right. You needn't tell me if you don't want to."

"I thought you wanted to know?"

"Well, I don't. I don't care anything about it."

"All right. Then I won't tell you."

Although Von Blumer had been married only a few months, he had learned a little. He began to whistle cheerfully. His wife stood it as long as she could, and then she got up and walked impatiently across the piazza.

"You *needn't* tell me."

"All right."

"You're horrid! You're *so* unkind."

"Good heavens, my dear! do you really want to know?"

"Certainly not. I wouldn't know for the

world. Don't tell me anything. Keep everything to yourself. Be just as unpleasant and cross and disagreeable as you want to be."

"But if you want to know——"

"Did I say I wanted to?"

Von Blumer got up. He was beginning to feel the effects of the strain.

"I guess I don't know much," he said, pathetically. "Here we are sitting quietly and peaceably on this piazza, looking off at the harmonious hills. I venture—understand, my dear, in the most timid manner I venture—to hint that I have had a piece of good luck. You tell me abruptly that you don't want to hear about it. I assent. Then you get mad because I haven't told you. Now, what in the world do you want me to do? I'll tell you, or I won't tell you. If you want me to love you, I'll do that. I'm willing to do anything you say to keep peace."

Charlotte began to sob.

"You needn't do anything!" she cried. "I don't want you to do anything. When you talk like that I'd rather you didn't do anything."

"Don't you want me to love you?" He attempted to put his arms around her.

"No!"

"Do you want me to leave you?"

"That's right! That's just like you—to want to leave me just when I want you the most!"

"But I don't! All I want is to do the right thing. I am ready to be anything or do anything that will make you happy."

"Well, if you really loved me, you'd know what to do."

Von Blumer was in despair. Out of a clear sky, the slightest of incidents had apparently precipitated a crisis. At this moment a fortunate incident occurred. The front gate opened with a pleasant click and Hen Beebe came up the path. Mrs. Von Blumer promptly fled from the scene.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Von Blumer."

"How are you, Hen? How's everything? How's Jerry?"

Beebe lowered his voice.

"That's what I came to see you about," he said. "Jerry ain't himself. He ain't been sence you left. He's kinder off his oats 'nd losin' his spunk 'nd ginger. He misses you, Mr. Von Blumer. He misses them moonlight rides. You see, you kep' him pretty busy. There ain't nobody else in town thet takes your place. Bill Smith 'nd his girl was out behind him t'other

day, but it didn't seem ter do him much good. I guess maybe it was only half-hearted kind o' spoonin', anyways. Bill ain't much o' a critter when it comes ter handlin' a gun, a hoss or a gal. He ain't got all ther p'ints of any of 'em down fine. Then there was Jed Pratt. He had ther school-teacher out behind Jerry lass Saturday. But it warn't no use. Jerry come back lookin' bluer 'n ever. Gosh!"

He slapped his hand on his knee as he exploded in a laugh.

"But he didn't look any wuss than that there schoolmarm. She was disapp'inted for fair."

"I'm afraid," said Von Blumer, with the memory of the past half-hour fresh upon him, "that I may not be much better. You see, Hen, I'm married now."

"I know you be," replied Hen. "That's why I kinder hurried up ter see you. You ain't been tied up long enough ter get over it yet, I'll bet on that! I'd like ter have you take Jerry out once in a while, just ter remind him of old times. It won't cost yer a cent. Taper off, if yer like. It will be a help, anyway."

"Well, I'll do it. Send him right up and I'll use him this afternoon. Maybe it's just what we need."

Von Blumer continued to sit on the piazza and wait for Hen Beebe to come back with Jerry. Doubtless he thought it best not to go inside. At this moment Major Buddway, smoking his inevitable cigar, strolled by.

"Hello, there, Major! Come in and have a chat."

The Major's portly form swung up the steps.

"Well, my boy, I haven't seen you to talk with since you went off in a blaze of glory, orange-blossoms and rice."

His keen eye rested for a moment on the face of his young friend.

"What!" he exclaimed, with that slight air of familiarity which people who have lived together in a restricted district frequently adopt toward each other—that familiarity which in a more diversified and heterogeneous population is always so keenly resented—"a young married man like you sitting alone and craving for company! Wife away?"

"Oh, no. I was just enjoying myself out here alone."

"Um!" said the Major. "When a man's been married three months, and isn't smoking, he doesn't sit on his own piazza alone on an

afternoon and enjoy himself. I've been married myself—just a few times," he added, with a slightly confessional voice.

Von Blumer crossed his legs.

"I suppose," he said, "that I don't understand a woman yet."

The Major smiled.

"I guess," he said, "you understand now better than you ever will. You can learn something progressive about everything else in the world but a woman. But the more you know about a woman the more your ignorance increases."

"Charlotte and I get along splendidly, as a rule," said Von Blumer. "Only, every once in a while something seems to go wrong. It depresses me, too. I feel as if it was unnecessary. Other people never have any trouble. There's Charlie Payton, an old friend of mine. He's been married twenty years, and he and his wife have never had a cross word."

The Major began to swell up. When his indignation was aroused he was always affected in this manner.

"Don't you believe it!" he said. "Marriages may be made in heaven, but not by angels. I only know of one man in my whole experience

who got along perfectly with his wife—who never said a cross word; who was always considerate; who never failed, during the whole course of their married life, to stand behind her chair at every meal and fit her in it; who used to fill her purse with bills when she wasn't looking, and who was so d——d polite that he was held up as an irritating example by all the other married women in the neighborhood. But one day, after they had been married about twenty-five years, she woke up and discovered that he had run through with all her money and robbed her of every cent she had."

"But she still loved him, didn't she?"

"She had to, my boy. He was all she had left. No, sir!" exclaimed the Major. "There's only one way for a man and his wife who are in love to get along permanently, and that is to be honest with each other and true to themselves, which means a scrap at stated intervals."

"Well, now," said Von Blumer, "suppose you have something to tell your wife—a piece of real good news, something you know she will like to hear. And, full of enthusiasm, you start to tell her. And right in the midst of your enthusiasm she stops you and flatly says

she doesn't want to hear about it. Suppose, then, you control yourself, and comply with her wishes and don't tell her, and then she gets mad because you don't. Suppose one thing leads to another—that you try to explain, that you offer to do anything she wants, and, no matter what you propose, she simply won't have it. Who's to blame, Major, and what's a man to do under those circumstances?"

"There's only one rule," said the Major.

"What's that?"

"Pet her. There's only one thing that a real, genuine woman never gets tired of, and that's being loved. When a woman is cross and irritable there's usually some reason for it which a man hasn't stopped to consider. That's when she wants to be loved the most. Every man leads a mental existence entirely apart from his love. But a woman's mental existence she has appropriated from man. It is never really hers, but she uses it in emergencies. The moment when you are most possessed with an idea, therefore—even though it may be one of material benefit to her—is just when she resents it most, because it has crowded out your love. Take old Dick Hayden, for instance. He never had much trouble with the wife of his who was

jealous of other women, because he could fool her. But the wife who was jealous of his business caused him no end of trouble, because he was always bringing it home with him."

"Here comes Hen Beebe with Jerry," interrupted Von Blumer. "I'm going to surprise Charlotte with a little drive," he added.

The Major got up and threw his cigar-stump across the lawn.

"Don't you do it!" he said; "especially on top of a scrap. Never surprise a woman with anything but a kiss or a present—never surprise her with anything which necessitates her doing something that she has not planned beforehand. Suggest it first. Well, I must be going. How that horse Jerry has changed! Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Major," said Von Blumer. "Sorry you can't stay, but glad you dropped in."

He waved to Hen Beebe to hitch Jerry and leave him, and then went cautiously upstairs.

Von Blumer was learning—learning that in married life, as well as in other departments of existence, discretion is the better part of harmony.

VI

IN WHICH IS DEVELOPED THE ASTOUNDING FACT THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A WOMAN TO KEEP A SECRET

CHARLOTTE was seated in the back room. Von Blumer came in quickly and put his arms around her.

"Forgive me, dear," he said. "It was all my fault."

"Nonsense! I was cross, also."

They embraced heartily, and then Von Blumer said, half-earnestly:

"By Jove, my dear! Do you know, it just occurs to me that you are looking pale. You ought to get out more in this country air. Why, your face is as white as my collar. Speaking of Jerry, Hen Beebe just dropped in to ask if we wanted to use him. It seems an age since we've seen him."

"Doesn't it?"

"I love that horse. Half the time he seems human. He's good company, too. What good times we've had with him, haven't we?"

"Yes, haven't we?"

"If Jerry was right here now, hitched up to the old buggy, I should like to step right in and take a ride."

Charlotte sighed.

"It would be rather nice!" she said, looking out of the window, longingly.

"Would you like it?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Well, what do you say? Put your things on and I'll get him."

In a few moments she was ready. As she stepped out onto the piazza, in obedience to her husband's call, she exclaimed:

"Well! Dear me! I never knew Hen Beebe to be so prompt before."

"Nor I," said Von Blumer, chuckling to himself.

Jerry pricked up his ears as they got in. His hitherto woe-begone expression slightly changed. And as Von Blumer took the reins and said, "Gittup!" he lifted up his legs in a manner that he had not done for three months. Jerry was almost himself again.

As they moved off slowly down the turnpike, Charlotte said:

"What was your good news?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Von Blumer, as if he had really forgotten all about it. "I must tell you, of course. You know that thing I've been working on—that invention for the mill? You've seen me drawing diagrams and working over those wood models?"

"Yes."

"Well, I got a patent on it last month, and yesterday I took it to a concern in New York, and they are actually going to buy it. Think of it, dearest! They will pay me five thousand dollars for it."

"Isn't that fine! Have you got the money?"

"No. You see, that is what they are willing to pay me—cash. But I thought I would better ask you first what you thought."

"Why, dear, if you can get five thousand dollars for something you have invented, that will be splendid. But isn't it worth more?"

"I don't think so. You see, they wouldn't look at it at first. Then they offered me one thousand. I wanted ten. Finally I got them up to five, and gave them an option until tomorrow—when I must go back."

"But if it's worth five thousand, why isn't it worth more?"

There was a slight sense of irritation in Von Blumer's voice as he replied:

"Why, my dear, there is a limit to all things. You might just as well say that it's worth a million."

"But they wouldn't have offered you that much unless they were going to make something out of it; would they?"

"Certainly not. But they run all the risk, and——"

"Why don't you run some of the risk?"

"I understand all about that. I've thought over every phase of it. You see, it's a bird in the hand. Five thousand in cash is not to be sneezed at. I've been offered a good position in New York, and with this money it will be a splendid start for us. I think I'd better accept it."

Charlotte drew herself up.

"Oh, all right," she said. "Of course, if you really want to accept, do so."

Suddenly she turned to him.

"If you are willing to sell it for that price," she said, "will you sell it to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'll give you five thousand for it. Will you let me have all I can make over?"

"Why, certainly."

"Then do what is necessary—give me the papers, and I'll go to New York to-morrow instead of you. I want to do some shopping, anyway."

"Why not both of us?"

"No—you might interfere. Besides, mother wants to go with me. I'll be back at night."

"All right; as you say. In the meantime, we mustn't disappoint Jerry."

And then he leaned over and kissed her, as the horse jogged contentedly along.

"Gosh!" said Hen Beebe, an hour later, as he groomed Jerry off. "You certainly do look better, Jerry. A little spoonin' acts like a tonic with you."

The next morning, on the earliest train, Mrs. Von Blumer and her mother started for the city. She was armed with a letter of introduction and certain papers Von Blumer had given her, together with a lot of instructions that she paid no attention to.

"Remember, dear," he whispered, as they parted, "get the cash if you can't do any better."

"You leave it to me," she replied, saucily. "Nobody is going to get the better of me."

All that day he waited in a fever of anxiety. A dozen times he chided himself with being such a fool as to intrust a business mission to a woman. But it was too late now, and he would have to accept the inevitable.

He was at the railroad station half an hour before the train came in, restlessly pacing back and forth. Dick Murdock, the station agent, laughed slyly as he saw him.

"When he's been married's long's I have," he said to himself, "he'll get over waiting for his wife."

Finally the familiar toot of the train was heard as it rolled in. Von Blumer sprang forward and assisted his bride off the steps, closely followed by her panting mother.

"Well," he exclaimed, eagerly, "how is it? How did you make out?"

Mrs. Von Blumer's face was radiant.

"Splendid!" she whispered. "I got just what I wanted—the loveliest piece of imported silk. Just think! reduced from one dollar to sixty-five cents a yard. Don't know when I've seen such a bargain. Do you, mama?"

"No," cried Mrs. Caterby. "Wasn't it lucky

we went to-day! And it's so becoming to you. I almost wish I'd got a dress of that other material."

"I know it. So do I. You know, I tried to persuade you."

"I know you did. It's all my fault, of course."

"It would have looked so well on you."

"Wouldn't it! Never mind. It can't be helped."

"You might write. You could describe it."

"Perhaps I'd better. I'll stop at the post-office. So glad I have an account there. They wouldn't pay the slightest attention to me if I didn't have an account."

"Dear me, no! They never do. Why, I can't get over that snippy salesgirl to-day. How she did stare at us!—just as if she thought we were from the country. And when I said, 'You may charge it,' how her manner changed!"

"Didn't it! Horrid thing! But you really think, dear, I'd better get that material?"

"I certainly do. I've thought so all along."

"About how many yards? Will twelve be enough?"

"Oh, better get fourteen and be sure."

"Well, we'll stop at the post-office, then, and I'll send them a postal. Dear me! I wish I had ordered it. How foolish of me not to! I hesitated——"

"I know you did."

"Why *didn't* you persuade me?"

"I did all I could."

"I know you did. Suppose they shouldn't have it? They may be all sold out by to-morrow morning. Wouldn't that be terrible?"

"Awful!"

"Well, I've only myself to blame. Still, you might——"

"You know, mama, I did all I could."

"I know you did; I can't blame you, of course. Oh, here's the post-office."

During this animated and heated argument Von Blumer had not been able to articulate a word. He had been literally swept along by the two women through the station crowd, almost by sheer force of their controversial strength, and he was now deposited in front of his almost breathless wife, as her mother hurried into the post-office to write her order on the dry-goods store.

"Quick!" he muttered. "In heaven's name,

tell me the result. How did you come out? Did you sell my patent?"

"S-sh!"

Charlotte looked at him cautiously.

"Please don't!" she whispered. "Don't you know what a place Swantown is for gossip? I'll tell you all about it when we get home."

Mrs. Caterby at this moment hurried out of the post-office.

"There!" she exclaimed; "it's done. I'm so nervous about it. Perhaps I shouldn't. Maybe it wasn't the right shade, after all. You know, the light wasn't very good. Do you think, dear, it was the right shade? I suppose I *could* countermand the order."

"Nonsense, mama! Of course it is the right shade. I'm sure you'll look lovely in it. Besides, you can send it back."

"They might not credit it. A piece cut——"

"But they won't have to. Now that you've got it, isn't it too bad that you didn't get that hat? They would have gone so well together."

"So they would. Dear, dear! why didn't I? Oh, why did you remind me? I shall be miserable."

"Never mind. Perhaps you can get the hat next week."

What agonies of torture Von Blumer endured under this running stream of conversation which the two ladies kept up without a second's intermission, until they kissed and parted at the gate, no human pen can adequately describe. With a mighty effort he controlled himself until he and Charlotte had entered their own house. Then, alone in the living-room, he closed the door and turned to her.

"How was it?"

"You didn't kiss me."

He kissed her feverishly, after which she opened her reticule and took out a bundle of silk samples, eyeing them lovingly. Then she gave a little scream.

"Good gracious! I hope I haven't lost it. Oh, no! Here it is."

She unrolled a crisp package. There were five new one-thousand-dollar bills.

"Here, my dear, is the money. I was afraid to have them give me a check, so they let me have the cash."

She handed him the bills.

"You're a brick!" he exclaimed, joyously. He folded one of the bills over her hand.

"Here, dear, you must take this—your commission."

She handed it back.

"I don't want it. A bargain is a bargain."

Von Blumer laughed.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "Now tell me all about it. Did you get any more? How did you come out? Tell me quick."

In reply, Charlotte tossed her pretty head in the air. She smiled a superior smile.

"Well, I *think* not!" she exclaimed. "Do you suppose I am going to tell you? I guess I can keep a secret, even if I am a woman."

VII

IN WHICH VON BLUMER LEARNS A THING OR TWO ABOUT APARTMENTS—AND WOMEN

"TO succeed in business," said Major Buddway, "go where there is the greatest number of men; but to be happy, go where there's the least number."

Von Blumer, meeting the Major on Main Street, had broken the news to him that he was going to accept a position in New York. He said nothing, however, about his good luck in placing his invention. Indeed, from the moment Mrs. Von Blumer had returned she had obstinately continued in her refusal to state the terms of her bargain.

"Why isn't it possible," said Von Blumer, "to be happy in a large city?"

The Major munched his cigar reflectively.

"Lots of people are contented in cities," he said; "but in the country a man has more time

to cultivate himself. It all depends upon temperament. If I wasn't president of a bank in Swantown, with time to gossip and think and enjoy my food, why, I'd be president of something or other in New York. I'd be doing things on a bigger scale, wouldn't be half so well known, and would have a good deal less stomach. But don't let this discourage you. By all means go. You'll get tired of it, but you'll learn wisdom."

"I am going," said Von Blumer. "I've got a chance to go into business and make a good thing, I hope, in the long run; and so to-morrow I'm going to get a place to live in—that is, I'm going to look over the ground and pick out something that my wife will like."

The Major smiled.

"Take my advice," he said, "and let your wife pick out something that you'll have to like, whether you want to or not. I suppose you're going to live in one of those pigeonhole compartments they dignify by the name of home?"

"Yes."

The Major frowned.

"It does beat all," he said, "how much discomfort some folks will put up with for the

sake of a few extra dollars. Here you have a ten-acre lot, with room enough to shout in and not be heard, and a certain, if limited, future ahead of you—calm, and peace, and quiet all the rest of your life. I'm fifty-five, and I'm having a better time every day—no nerves, no discomforts, everything serene. A country life for me! Away from the hurly-burly; away from care and strained nerves and fierce excitements, where a man can commune with nature occasionally without being called up over the telephone."

"Well," said Von Blumer, "that's too bad. You know, I've been fortunate, through Colonel Pinkerly, my father's classmate. I've met a lot of influential men in town—it was through one of them that I made my present connection; and the other day, when I was taking lunch at the Lawyers' Club, I heard old Holton say—you know Holton, the railroad man—that they were looking for some one with experience, who was acquainted with finances, banking, etc., to take the vice-presidency of a new trust company they were forming. Holton said they wanted a shrewd, reliable man who hadn't lived all his life in town. And I immediately thought of you. But, of course,

you wouldn't think of taking any such position, now that I know how you feel about the city."

Major Buddway shifted from one foot to the other.

"Um!" he said, reflectively. "He didn't mention what the salary was, did he?"

"Why, it seems to me he said something like five thousand dollars a year to begin on, with opportunities, of course."

"Of course."

There was a silence. Von Blumer looked off up Main Street. His wife was coming in the distance. They were just about to take the train to town.

"Here comes Charlotte," said Von Blumer. "Well, I must be off. Sorry, Major, you feel that way about the city. But I've no doubt you're right. So long."

He started.

"Hey!" cried the Major. "Wait a minute! Of course, what I said about the country is true. But you understand, my boy, that I spoke only in a general way. I won't take back a word I said. No, sir! God made the country. Man made the city. Still, there are exceptions to every rule. I've always felt that I was more or less restricted here in Swan-

town. No large opportunities—no big deals. Now, I'm just fitted for that sort of thing. You might say—in an offhand way, mind you—that—well, that I would consider such a thing."

"All right, Major. I'll tell 'em you'll consider. Good-bye!"

"Hold on there!" The Major came after him, almost breathless. "Wait a minute, Henry. Perhaps you'd better put it a little stronger. You might say that I was just the man for the place."

"All right."

"And that I'm ready to give a personal interview at any time."

"All right."

"That I can take the first train——"

"Very well."

"Perhaps I'd better go along with you now. I——"

Von Blumer was getting alarmed. He had made arrangements to spend a few days with his wife looking up their new quarters in the city, and he never dreamed that what was to him a matter of such slight interest should suddenly loom so large.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "Trust me, Major.

I'll let you know later. It will be all right." And he rushed off to Charlotte, who was beckoning him to hurry, as the whistle of the express could be heard.

"Well," she said, as they sank back in their seats as they moved out of the station, "I was really afraid you'd miss the train. You seemed to be very much interested in Major Buddway, or he in you."

"Yes. I was telling him that we were going to town to live, and he was remarking that one could be much happier in the country."

Charlotte smiled.

"Nonsense!" she observed. "The Major likes to talk. Give him a chance to live in town, and he'd jump at it. He was envying you—that's all."

"How did you know that?"

"Why, I thought everybody knew that who knows the Major."

Thereupon Von Blumer discreetly changed the subject. For he was unwilling to admit, even to himself, that there are some things which a woman divines instantly, which it takes almost a surgical operation to get through a man's head.

Arriving in town, they proceeded to the

business on hand without further delay. Von Blumer had already been over the ground, and had made a graded list of apartments. The first on the list was the cheapest. Von Blumer had already learned to use a certain amount of forethought in financial matters where his wife was concerned. He began to prepare her for what was to come, with a certain awkward cunning.

"This first apartment," he said, "is really a delightful little affair. Of course, dear, after your free, open life in the country, you must be prepared for a certain smallness; but it's really *so* snug, and everything is so convenient."

He led the way into a dark hall, where they almost bumped into the stairs that led up to the roof.

Charlotte gave one sniff.

"Why, it's positively black here," she exclaimed, "and *smelly.*"

"But wait till you see it. Come."

"How far up?"

"Only four flights."

"No—I don't like it. I should die in a place like this."

They went out into the street. Von Blumer

"I should die in a place like this."

mentally crossed the next two off his list. They were not much better than this one.

"All right," he said. "Now, I'll show you something I know you'll like."

They went up ten squares and paused on the threshold of a yellow brick structure that took up—or seemed to—nearly the whole block. The hall in this one was larger. Charlotte sniffed again.

"No elevator," she said. "We can't get along without an elevator."

"But, my dear, elevators are expensive. You've lived all your life in the country and never had one."

"But our friends would never come to see us."

"Just come up and look."

They mounted three flights. Mrs. Von Blumer followed the janitor through the entire series of rooms, then out into the hall and down the stairs.

"Well?" said Von Blumer.

"Wasn't it awful! No decent closets. Two dark rooms, and the decorations! Dear me! they made me positively ill."

Thus it was with the next, and the next, and the next. Finally Von Blumer decided they must have an elevator. He had reserved those

apartments with elevators for the last—in case he had to play them.

But they did not suit much better. One by one they were visited, inspected, and rejected.

Suddenly, however, as they were walking through a quiet street on the West Side, Mrs. Von Blumer stopped short.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Look at that. That looks nice."

Her husband looked where she indicated. A magnificent-appearing white stone structure greeted his gaze. Two carved lions, couchant, ornamented the sides of the grand entrance, which was lined with magnificent palms.

"Come!" said Charlotte, authoritatively. She grabbed him by the arm. Without a word he followed.

A noble knight in livery met them as they entered. He escorted them to another knight, who straightway dispatched a diminutive page —also in livery—for the superintendent.

In a few moments that gentleman appeared on the scene.

"Have you any vacant apartments?" asked Charlotte, taking the reins.

"Yes, madam—there is one."

"On what floor?"

"The fourth."

"That is good."

The superintendent sent the page for the keys, and in a moment they were whisked upstairs and into the hall of the apartment.

Charlotte was now thoroughly at home.

"You see," she whispered to her paralyzed partner, "this is more like. Two bathrooms. Plenty of closets. Quiet decorations. Sunny exposure. No shafts." She turned to the superintendent. "You have all modern improvements?" she asked.

"Certainly, madam. The elevator runs all night. Mail shutes on every floor. Telephones. Steam heat. Gas or coal range, as you see. Washing room on roof—everything."

"I think this would suit me very nicely," said Charlotte. "There are some things about it I would change. Still, we would manage very well."

"I should think we *might* worry along," said Von Blumer, with a slight touch of sarcasm in his voice, which he managed to find for the first time since they entered. "By the way, sir, what is the price?"

"Five thousand dollars a year."

Mrs. Von Blumer looked inquiringly at her

husband, who was trying to conceal the fact that he was convulsively clutching a cut-glass door-knob for support.

"Does this strike you as being rather high, dear?" she observed.

Von Blumer smiled loftily. He rose suddenly and serenely to the occasion.

"High!" he repeated. "High! Not at all."

He waved his arm around.

"Of course," he went on, "it all depends upon how one regards such a matter. If you are satisfied, my dear, I have nothing to say. For myself, I should prefer—well, something, perhaps, a little better."

"Better!"

"Yes. This apartment has only two bathrooms. Of course, two bathrooms are all very well. But personally, I prefer four. Then, again, I do not see an Oriental room. I do not see how we could possibly get along without an Oriental room. Of course, as I said before, we *might* worry along."

Von Blumer shrugged his shoulders.

"That is for you to say."

"We had another apartment on the other side," said the superintendent, "for seven thousand dollars. Three more rooms—one more

bathroom—that might suit you better, but it has been taken."

"There!" exclaimed Von Blumer. "I've no doubt that would be the thing. What a pity it's taken! I'm afraid," he said to the superintendent, "that this wouldn't do. It isn't quite what we want. Thank you for your kindness."

When they finally got out into the street, Charlotte turned to him reproachfully.

"What *was* the matter with you, dear?" she said. "I'm sure that man knew you were guying him."

"Matter!" cried Von Blumer. "Nothing. Only we won't look at any more apartments to-day. Instead, we'll go straight back to the hotel. I've got something to say to you."

"Well," said Charlotte, decisively, "there's one thing certain—I've seen only one apartment that I would think of living in, and, of course, I suppose that is too high."

"Well, rather."

They fortified themselves with a quiet dinner, Mrs. Von Blumer, with wise precaution, refusing to discuss anything with her husband until afterward.

When it was over, and they had gone to their room, she faced him.

"Now, dear," she said, "what have you to say? So far as I'm concerned, I feel pretty well discouraged."

Von Blumer had come to a decision. He was, therefore, calm and confident.

"Dearest," he said, "the situation is quite simple. We've got to live, and we've got to live here—or else give up all future prospects. Now, I can afford to pay sixty dollars a month for rent, and not a cent more. So far as I'm concerned, I can put up with almost anything, so don't consider me. You do as you please. You make your own choice. Get a place to live in. I don't care where it is, or what it is, so long as it isn't any more than sixty dollars a month. You may have more money than you need, but I haven't."

"Dear me! Why didn't you say this before?"

"Because I thought you'd be pleased with what I showed you."

"But I wasn't."

"I know it. I've tried. Now you see what *you* can do."

"Let's see. That's seven hundred and twenty dollars a year."

"Yes."

"All right."

The next morning Mrs. Von Blumer was up bright and early. After breakfast they parted, Von Blumer to go downtown on business. He came back at noon."

"Any luck?"

"Oh, yes."

"What?"

"I've secured an apartment."

"You don't tell me! How much?"

"I knew you'd ask that. Will you give me all I've saved?"

Von Blumer laughed.

"I don't know," he said, doubtfully. "I did something like that with that invention of mine, and you've never even told me how much you made out of it."

"No. And I don't intend to. But come and see what I've got."

She hurried him onto a car.

In fifteen minutes they were in front of a large apartment house.

"This has a familiar look," said Von Blumer.

"There!" said his wife, ignoring his remark, as they went up in a diminutive elevator, and she took him into a series of rather pleasant rooms. "This isn't the best in the world, but

it's the best I could get for fifty-five dollars a month."

"The rest is yours!"

"All right; and I guess it will do—for a year or so, anyway. I can trim it up and make it look real nice and cosy, and we can be, oh, *so* happy!"

The janitor had left them to themselves.

Von Blumer went over to his wife and put his hands on her shoulders.

"My dear girl," he said, "of course it's all right. You're a brick! But tell me, dearest, why is there such a change? Don't you remember that yesterday this was the sixth apartment on my list, and that you wouldn't even look at it?"

"Certainly I do."

"And now?"

"Well, you see, dear, yesterday you were doing it. But to-day I am. *That* makes all the difference in the world. Besides——"

He put his arms around her, while her head dropped on his shoulder.

"Besides," she added, wistfully, "you know that I've got to have a home—soon."

VIII

A CHAPTER WHICH THE READER IS HEREBY WARNED TO SKIP, AS IT CONTAINS NOTHING OF ANY SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

IN these hurried days of compressed life, where the value of time is so much better (or so much less!) understood than of old, no self-respecting and ambitious story-writer permits himself the luxury of indulging in reflections of his own. His business is to supply the public with such wares as the consensus of opinion among experts has determined to be the most salable.

"Here, madam," he says to the first lady who wanders, aimless and uncertain, toward his stall in the literary market, "is a delightful affair in red and yellow, now the fashionable colors. It

matches your complexion; it has the proper admixture of love and sentiment; it is exciting, but not, of course, immoral, its tone being pure throughout, except where its allusions are properly veiled. It exalts what you desire to see exalted, and avoids the unpleasant. It is clever, exceedingly clever, full of choice epigrams that fit like mosaics into the theme; it has the proper number of French phrases, revealing quite naturally the author's acquaintance with the world; it has a compelling style, a breathless interest, and is strictly perishable; therefore, lose no time, but buy, buy, buy!"

The present author confesses to a secret sense of shame that, in spite of every effort to make it otherwise, this is, after all, a commonplace chronicle, about commonplace people, written in a commonplace way. It was his sincere desire that this might be otherwise. He tried to have it so. But if he has failed in this, there is one thing he will not do: he will at least not be dishonest with the patient reader who still remains; who is hereby warned that he is to expect nothing of a startling nature. He is at entire liberty to toss aside the narrative at this point; or, if he has the courage to keep on, let him be as ungentle as he desires;

only let him not say he was deceived, or that fair promises were held out to him in the beginning.

The truth is that the author started out with the best intentions in the world. His theme was to be original; his story was to be full of action; his allusions were to be learned, his situations dramatic, his style a model of epigrammatic brevity. In all these he has failed; and yet also he has failed in a still more important matter, for he now admits, almost in a whisper, that the Von Blumers are not even so interesting to him as he hoped they might be. There have been occasions when Von Blumer has been a frightful bore: for example, during a certain period after the baby came, when Von Blumer himself kept at the subject as if *his* baby were the only one in the world. Neither has Mrs. Von Blumer been all that was expected of her; and this, the reader is informed, is said in no ungallant spirit; she has been irritable when she should have been gentle and yielding, and has done all kinds of unexpected things; and, to sum up the whole matter, the author, who has lived with them both for some years, thinks it but right to inform the reader that to get away from them at inter-

vals, to be free to kick up his heels, to talk to himself, is the greatest relief imaginable.

There is, however, a singular exception to the assertion that the commonplace is uninteresting, and that exception is the average baby. Babies, so dignified statisticians inform us, are coming into the world at the rate of sixty a minute: this process has been going on from time immemorial; it will doubtless continue for ages to come. It is the one industry that never flags. The proceeds are always likely to be unprofitable. It is one of the few occupations in which there is no money; and yet, in spite of its monotony and uniformity, the baby continues to be a source of perpetual interest. All of us elderly folks, white-haired ladies and gray-bearded codgers, as we look down with ever-increasing awe at the last entry into our world, unconsciously bow down to him and in our hearts do him reverence: it is we who are infants, for, with timid feet and wavering footsteps, are we not soon to set out into an unknown world like children groping in the dark and calling the name of father? This little one, sucking his knuckle before us, is far older than we: the King of to-morrow, he takes up life where we leave it off.

As for Von Blumer, there is no means of knowing what he actually thought on the subject; we may only draw inferences from his actions. From these we may confidently affirm that from the instant after its safe arrival on schedule time he secretly felt there was no other baby but his own; not because he went about proclaiming it loudly all the time, but because, just as often, he made evident efforts to conceal it.

"Did you ever," he said, the day after, in the presence of his wife and the trained nurse, "see anything in your life so homely as that kid? Can it be that I'm responsible for anything like that?"

At this, both women protested—the trained nurse, who didn't know him, more violently than Mrs. Von Blumer, who did. A better indication of the real state of his mind was no doubt revealed later, however, when, in a confidential talk with Major Buddway, he admitted that the baby was in reality "Fine! Yes, sir, perfect in every way."

"How much did it weigh?" asked the Major.

"Seven pounds at birth—just about right, I should say. These twelve and fifteen pound babies——"

Von Blumer snapped his fingers in derision.

"Nothing to them! They thrive for a while, look healthy, and then, the first thing you know —puff! They're out of the game. No, sir! Give me the child that begins moderately—seven pounds at birth, I should say, is an ideal weight—and increases slowly but surely, week by week. *That's* the kind of a baby to have!"

The Major nodded his head in dignified acquiescence.

"Good digestion?" he asked.

"First rate! Splendid! Of course, all babies have the colic. Mine is no exception. But he is by far the most *normal* child I have ever seen."

Von Blumer delivered this in a tone that seemed to imply that he had done nothing all of his life but study the normality of babies.

"Well," said the Major, after pressing his glass to his lips, "I can remember, when I was first married, that it didn't seem quite natural not to have a baby around the house. My first wife used to complain a good deal about having 'em, and I guess she was right, too! But, after all, looking back on it now, taking everything into due consideration, it was the happiest time in our lives. We probably couldn't have gotten

rid of 'em if we had tried—babies are always more or less of a drug on the market. They were a constant source of trouble and expense. They kept us busy, I can tell you! We didn't have much time to think, and when we did, it wasn't about ourselves. And I guess that's the real secret of life, after all. Of course, if you're married and can't have children, why, you can't, and that's all there's to it; all you can do is to make the best of each other. And there seems to be a kind of compensation about this, as about everything else. For I've noticed that the married folks who don't have children don't seem to miss 'em—they don't know what they haven't got; they kind of warm up a lot of fictitious interests and think they're real, like a hen setting on china eggs. They loll around evenings and read aloud to each other; they travel and play cards, and cultivate their neighbors and build houses, and save up their money and develop their minds, and think they are really living. Well, they are—in a way. But their dolls are sawdust; their toys are gilt and tinsel. The worst of it is that a man doesn't always reach the limits of what there is in life when his children all turn out well—that's only

one side of it. There was Hawkins I used to know: his children all came up without trouble, regular and hardy and easy to raise, and Hawkins couldn't understand any other kind of children. At seventy he was intolerant and narrow. But you take the man who has had one of his boys or girls go wrong—that's a peculiar kind of misery that gets 'way inside and *twists;* and when you've felt the pain of it you're never the same again; yet, somehow, you reach out wider."

He got up and slapped Von Blumer on the shoulder.

"Which reminds me," he said, "that I haven't thanked you for your suggestion. I got that job with Holton. It's a great change to leave Swantown. But I'm glad to get into somewhat larger financial circles, and, between you and me, I think I can teach 'em a trick or two."

IX

IN WHICH CERTAIN INCIDENTS COMBINE TO FORCE THE CONCLUSION THAT ALL THE WORLD LOVES A BABY

THE morning after the arrival of the baby, Von Blumer walked out of his apartment with a firm step and a new feeling of suppressed dignity.

The first person he saw was the elevator boy.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Albert."

"How's the baby, sir?"

"First rate, thank you. Not a desirable thing to have around here, Albert."

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. It puts new life into the building."

Albert said this unconsciously.

"It's a boy, sir?" he added.

"Yes—seven pounds."

"A good weight, sir. My sister has 'em up to ten, but they thins down later."

In the narrow hallway, as Von Blumer was going out, a voice he had heard before greeted him.

"I beg your pardon."

He turned and recognized the little authoress who lived in the apartment above. She was a trim little body, with a fresh, almost infantile, face—quite the reverse of what one expects to see in the author of such a strident tale as "The Cry of Blood." Von Blumer had gotten into the habit of nodding to her in a friendly way.

"I heard the news this morning," she said, with a smile, "and I know you will forgive me, but I'm so much interested."

Von Blumer blushed.

"Oh," he said; "you refer to—to——"

"To the baby, of course. I hope all is well."

"Very nicely, thank you."

"Do you know, I've never seen a real young baby, except—oh, yes, except once, and that was in an incubator. But they didn't seem a bit natural, or alive."

"I only hope the child will not disturb you."

"Don't be worried. I'm not that kind. May I tell you something?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I'm dying to see him. Do you suppose—sometime—soon——"

Von Blumer caught his breath. He had had a hard time to get a good look at the baby himself, strongly fortified as that individual was by the trained nurse.

"I should be pleased," he said, gravely. "Only——"

Then he regarded his new friend with suspicion.

"You wish, I presume, to make a study of him, possibly, for your new book?"

From what Von Blumer had always understood about authoresses, it did not seem to him that she could have any other object than this.

She laughed outright.

"Dear me, no!" she cried. "I just want to give him a good hug—just for myself, alone."

"Well, you shall, if such a thing is possible."

Von Blumer walked over to the Avenue to take the omnibus downtown. This means of locomotion was slow, but the ride on top of the 'bus did him good, and he often indulged in it when he wished to collect his thoughts. It had happened that he had frequently ridden on the same 'bus, the driver of which had come to

recognize him. And here he was coming down the Avenue.

Von Blumer sprang up by his side.

What is it about the weather that, left to itself, moulds such faces the world over? We see them in the tugboat sailors, the pilots, the Adirondack and Swiss guides. No matter where the weather can get a good, constant grip on a face, what a color it paints and what lines it brings out!

Von Blumer's companion was no exception to the rule. For years, winter and summer, he had driven his horses back and forth along one of the most cosmopolitan streets in the world. Serene and sane and content, he jostled the equipages of millionaires and rang up his fares with a healthy indifference.

"Well," said Von Blumer, cheerily, as they started up, "this is a fine day."

An original observation! The driver took it with a proper sense of the dignity of his position. He did not answer at once. Then he cast his eye around as much of the horizon as he could see.

"There be a storm brewin'," he said at last. "Wind's changed to the eastward."

"These easterly winds are beastly!"

"Ah, waal, 'tis all in a loifetime."

Von Blumer's mind was on other things than the weather.

"I believe you said," he observed, "the last time I rode with you, that you were a family man."

"Oi am that. Sure 'nd Oi have nine children."

Von Blumer paused. The idea of confiding his own little addition to an individual so sated with infancy seemed a risky proceeding.

"Must be quite a job," he said, "to bring up such a family; especially," he smiled sympathetically, "on this route."

The driver drew his sleeve across his mouth as he slowed up at a corner.

"We ain't keepin' our money in barrels in the cellar," he observed, sententiously. "Wan o' them there city missionaries came to my woife t'other day 'nd said we do be makin' a mistake a-havin' so many o' the wee wans. 'Nd Maggie, my woife, she says ter her: 'Sure,' says she, 'would ye be deprivin' us of the only pleasure we have?' says she. But they be a care."

"Yes," said Von Blumer, "I had one of 'em come yesterday—my first."

The driver cocked his eye up and gave a keen glance at his companion.

"Waal, sir, the more the merrier. Phat was his weight?"

Von Blumer hitched uneasily.

"Seven pounds."

"Siven pounds, is it? Ah, waal, that's not so bad fer a man o' your size. The woife has had 'em up ter fifteen, by the green-grocer's scales in the basement. Wait till yer get 'em comin' by twos and threes."

Von Blumer laughed, in spite of himself. It being his corner, he started to get down from the 'bus.

"Excuse *me!*" he said.

His friend waved his hand.

"Sure, there's nothin' loike 'em."

That morning Von Blumer had an errand at his bank. On behalf of his business associates, he had been empowered to negotiate a loan. Forthwith he stepped into a white marble-fronted building and asked to see the president.

That gentleman had but just arrived, and there were numerous people to see him, so Von Blumer had to wait for some time. Finally, however, he was taken through a mahogany-

lined corridor and shown into a very private office.

A white-haired, immaculately groomed gentleman, with sharp whiskers and keen eyes, greeted him briskly.

Von Blumer introduced himself and briefly stated the object of his visit.

The great man shook his head gravely.

"Not interested," he said. "At present we don't care to extend our personal collateral loans. Possibly later——"

Von Blumer rose.

"Very well, sir," he replied. "Sorry to have troubled you."

"Not at all, sir. Good morning."

As Von Blumer turned to go out, his eye fastened on the miniature portrait of a baby that hung over the president's desk. That morning he was not seeing much but babies.

"Nice baby, that," he said, with a smile. "Lot of character in so young a face."

He looked at the president apologetically.

"I'm a trifle interested in babies this morning," he said. "My first one arrived yesterday."

A sympathetic smile came over the face of the president of the bank—a smile such as no

one would dream, had they seen him a moment before, could come to such a face.

"Indeed!" he said. "That's good news, I'm sure. Been married long?"

"About a year."

"Boy?"

"Yes."

"That's my grandchild you see there. Sit down. Funny you should have noticed the character in his face. Yes, oh, yes, he has it. He'll be two years old in December."

"I'll bet he's fond of his grandfather," said Von Blumer.

"Well, we have pretty good times together. His mother says I spoil him. But that's always the privilege of grandparents. Wife well?"

"Very well, thank you."

Von Blumer leaned over confidentially. "Hope you'll pardon me for saying so," he said, "but you're the first man I've met to-day who—who—well, understands how a man feels the first time. I know you know. I'm proud as a peacock."

He smiled and got up.

"Of course you are. Nothing like a baby—I wouldn't be without one if I could help it. How long did you want that money for?"

"Six months, with privilege of renewal."

"Well, I guess we can stretch a point and arrange it."

The president touched a bell.

"Tell the loan clerk to step this way."

Fifteen minutes later, when Von Blumer got to his office and stated that he had arranged the loan, it took him some time to convince the head of his firm that it was true.

That gentleman was Mr. Van Cort—a bachelor.

"Better take a day off, after that stroke of business," he said.

"Think I will," said Von Blumer, "with your permission. New arrival at my house yesterday."

"You don't say! Boy or girl?"

"Boy."

"I suppose you're tickled to death. How does it seem?"

"Pretty good. Of course, you don't understand those matters—and I didn't until yesterday; but it does make a man chesty."

"Why, certainly. Great thing! Congratulations."

Van Cort leaned over confidentially and said, in a whisper:

"What are you feeding him on—the original package?"

"Yes—sure."

"Well, you know, in case you have to start him on anything else, I've got a great preparation."

The idea that a New York bachelor—a man-about-town—the best bridge player in his club—could understand *babies* almost took Von Blumer's breath away.

"What do *you* know about it?" he said.

"A good deal. I've been interested in babies for some time, and I know a great food. Sometimes it's hard to get the right thing—my sister has told me all about it. Just call on me."

"All right; I will."

At this moment a telegram was put into Von Blumer's hands:

"Expect me to-morrow afternoon on two o'clock train.

"C. CATERBY."

Von Blumer started back. Here was a pretty situation: his wife's mother coming to-morrow to superintend things. As if things were not already being run with a high hand by Miss

Preston, the trained nurse. What would happen when these two opposing forces met? He shuddered when he thought of the awful complications.

Von Blumer was by no means a coward. But what hope is there for any man between a trained nurse and a mother-in-law?

X

IN WHICH VON BLUMER DEVELOPS SOME ORATORICAL ABILITY AND PROVES HIMSELF A HERO

THERE was, however, no help for it. Von Blumer went home with a slight depression and confided the news to Charlotte, who was naturally delighted.

Miss Preston, the trained nurse, heard the message, standing at the foot of the bed with a glass of warm milk in one hand and a clinical thermometer in the other.

"I knew mama would come as soon as she could," said Charlotte, faintly. "She wants to see the baby so much."

Miss Preston elevated her eyebrows. She was a wonderfully neat, trim combination of white apron, bedticking, fine complexion and soft, brown eyes. Her chin, however, was ag-

gressive. Besides, she had behind her four years of hospital training, and she was fairly able to take care not only of her patient, but of herself.

"It would not be well for you to see too many people just now," she said, mildly. "Of course, Mr. Von Blumer, as a special concession"—she smiled pathologically at that gentleman—"I myself might be willing, but the doctor, I'm afraid, might object."

"Certainly, certainly," said Von Blumer. "That's quite right. Perhaps," he said, hastily snatching at a straw, "I'd better wire your mother to wait."

"Oh, no," said Charlotte; "that wouldn't do. Mama would never forgive me. She's splendid," she added, "in sickness."

Miss Preston elevated her eyebrows again. Her silence was expressive.

The next afternoon Von Blumer met Mrs. Caterby at the station.

"I simply can't wait to take up that baby," she exclaimed, as soon as she saw him. "And Charlotte—is she all right? When I got the message I didn't dare open it for the *longest* time. Isn't it fortunate that I could come?"

"We're pretty well fixed at present," said

Von Blumer. "The doctor comes regularly at five dollars a visit."

"Awful, isn't it?"

"Terrible. I supposed," he said, "that the city and country storks were all the same, but I guess the city ones have larger bills."

Mrs. Caterby paid no attention to this weak attempt at a joke.

"The nurse," she demanded, "is she a good one?"

Von Blumer saw his chance.

"Oh, yes! Splendid," he replied. "She's a regular graduate, of course, and quite scientific. You won't have to do a thing. It's fine to be relieved of any responsibility. You have no idea how fine it is to love the baby at a distance. It seems strange I know, but it's the only way."

"Umph! Don't believe she knows anything —or nearly as much as I do. I'll show her."

Von Blumer opened the door of his apartment with his key. Mrs. Caterby, losing no time on ceremony, swept through the hall. In front of the door she was confronted by Miss Preston. Von Blumer introduced them. Mutually, in a lightning glance, they took each other's measure.

"Where is my daughter?"

"I would rather not disturb her at present."

"And the baby?"

"With his mother."

"Oh!"

"Perhaps," said Von Blumer, "you'd better take off your things, and we'll have a quiet little cup of tea; and by that time——" He glanced inquiringly at Miss Preston.

That young woman smiled, and nodded.

"The doctor's orders are that she shouldn't be disturbed," she said. "But, of course, under the circumstances, you may see her for a short time later on."

Von Blumer led Mrs. Caterby into the living-room, where she sank back into a chair.

"I don't care to interfere with your arrangements," she said; "but I must say, Henry, that I really think that nurse is the most disagreeable person I ever saw. I don't see how you stand her!"

"Why, I thought she was first rate. I don't know much about these things, but they've advanced somewhat in the care of babies. And she seems to understand her business. I suppose she has to be strict——"

Mrs. Caterby was rocking back and forth in her chagrin.

"My own daughter!" she exclaimed, half to herself. "My own Charlotte! To be insulted and kept away from her by an utter stranger!"

There was a sob in her voice.

"But, mother dear," said Von Blumer, who was becoming a trifle hysterical himself, "what would you like me to do? I can't order her out of the house. It would disturb Charlotte, who's doing so beautifully, *so* beautifully." Von Blumer's voice almost ended in a wail.

"Of course you can't," said Mrs. Caterby. "I understand perfectly. My feelings got the better of me. We will simply have to submit. But it's going to be awfully hard for me, I can tell you, to sit here with folded hands and not be able to lift a finger. And when I know so much more than she does," she added, pathetically.

Von Blumer sighed.

"Well," he said, "it's a trifle hard for me, too. I haven't taken a good, square look at that kid yet myself. I never felt of any less consequence in my life. But it's all in a good cause."

Miss Preston entered.

"You may see your daughter now."

Mrs. Caterby lost no time. She almost flew

into her daughter's room, closely followed by the nurse and Von Blumer.

"Charlotte!"

"Mama!"

"Where is he? The dear, darling little sing!"

Miss Preston put her finger on her lips.

"Asleep—in the next room. You shall see him when I'm giving him his bath."

Thus Mrs. Caterby very gradually renewed her acquaintance with her daughter and came to know her grandchild—with certain hygienic reservations.

Several days passed, in which the strict régime was maintained by the nurse, with a bide-my-time acquiescence by Mrs. Caterby, and during which period Von Blumer was gathering facts about babies—facts about their deportment, their feeding, their care and general treatment. It was evident, as Mrs. Von Blumer got better and the baby older, that her mother's reign was growing nearer and Miss Preston's reign was growing weaker. It was the old school against the new. Which, indeed, was the better?

One Sunday, Von Blumer, who was getting almost as uneasy as Mrs. Caterby, took her aside.

"This afternoon," he said, "Miss Preston is going out of town to see a friend. Now is our chance!"

"Splendid! We'll make the most of it."

At three o'clock Miss Preston, having arranged the baby to suit herself and given minute instructions, disappeared down the elevator.

In less time than it takes to tell, Von Blumer had the baby in his arms.

He dangled and jounced him until that individual resented the treatment so strenuously that his grandmother came to the rescue. Then his mother had her turn.

He was rocked and cuddled and loved.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Caterby. "I'm so glad to get that woman out of the house. Now that you're better, Charlotte, I can tell you what I've been through with."

And she rehearsed her sorrows as rapidly as her tongue—by no means a feeble instrument—would permit.

"Don't I know, mama! I haven't been able to take care of him a bit myself. But, really, Miss Preston is quite nice, and she has been so good to me!"

"I suppose so; only it makes me so provoked

—as if I didn't know how to take care of a baby. I never heard of such notions."

"Hurray!" shouted Von Blumer, snatching up his son and holding him up at arms' length, as he danced around the room. "Isn't it grand to do as you please! I feel like a boy out of school! Who cares for medicinal science, anyway!"

At this moment the door quietly opened, and Miss Preston entered the room.

At the scene before her—at Von Blumer and his baby; at Mrs. Caterby, who was making up the crib over again to suit herself; at Charlotte, who was sitting up in a chair, looking out of the window, contrary to the doctor's orders—the nurse gazed silently, spellbound.

Then the two women faced each other.

"I missed my train and came back," said Miss Preston, quietly, "and I guess it was just as well. This will *never* do."

"What do you mean?"

"I am responsible for my patient. She should not be out of her bed. And the baby will be completely upset."

"I don't agree with you."

"I cannot help it. I have my orders."

"Then I have *nothing* to say about my own daughter?"

"She can get another nurse—if she wishes."

Von Blumer had been slowly rising to the situation. He now handed the baby quietly to the nurse and held up his hand. He had been to many a dinner party, but he said afterward that this was the first real speech he had ever made.

"You're both right," he said. "Miss Preston, science is one thing, and love is another. You represent Science, and this good lady"—he pressed Mrs. Caterby's hand affectionately—"represents Love. A baby is an animal, and in a certain sense he ought to be treated as an animal; but in another sense he needs to be loved, not so much on his own account as on account of others. Miss Preston, yesterday morning I saw you, when you thought no one was looking, take that child up in your arms and give him a good, old-fashioned hug and kiss. Now, didn't you?"

Miss Preston blushed.

"Yes," she said; "I couldn't help it. He is *such* a dear!"

"Very well. You had no right to do it. It was against the doctor's orders. It wouldn't

At the scene before her the nurse gazed silently, spellbound.

do to treat that baby all the time just as we've been treating him this afternoon. But this sort of thing is just as necessary as the other."

He went over to the cabinet and quietly took out a decanter of sherry and four glasses, which he filled.

"And now," he said, "let us all be friends."

He raised his glass to the light. The others, in spite of themselves, silently obeyed him. At certain moments Von Blumer was always irresistible.

"Here's to Love and Science," he said. "They're both necessary. But Love first, every time!"

XI

IN WHICH IT IS DEVELOPED THAT A MAN CAN KEEP A SECRET AS WELL AS A WOMAN

THOSE misanthropes who do not believe in luck should try their hand at raising babies. In spite of every assertion to the contrary, every one of them is a family mascot.

Von Blumer's baby was no exception. From the moment of his interview with the president of the bank, he had become healthily prosperous. The world of business was his natural element. More and more he became absorbed in his affairs. Mrs. Von Blumer, on the other hand, grew more restless. That lady, it must be confessed, did not like the city. Her only relief from its monotony seemed to be occasional visits to Swantown.

"I wish," she said one day, "that we could look out upon something besides roofs, and

hear other noises than the rattling of wagons. Besides, the baby needs better air."

"Strange," said Von Blumer, "that you should have mentioned it, because I was thinking of the same thing. You've heard me speak of Dimpleton?"

"Yes."

"Well, he lives at Tiverdale, one hour from the City Hall, delightful surroundings, no malaria——"

"You speak," said Charlotte, "as if you were reading from a prospectus."

"Never mind. I got it from Dimpleton. I won't discourage you about it any more. Only —will you come out and look at it?"

"Yes. Anything is better than this life."

The next week they had visited Tiverdale, and, their lease being nearly up, had engaged a house in that charming suburb.

Mrs. Von Blumer then announced her intention of hurrying off to Swantown to tell the news to her mother.

The morning of her departure she said:

"I hope, dear, you will keep watch over the baby while I'm gone. I am not quite easy in my mind about that nurse."

The baby, now nearly a year old, was just

beginning to develop the first stage of that abnormal activity which seems to be a peculiar prerogative of extreme youth.

As Mrs. Von Blumer spoke she fastened on her gloves and looked anxiously at her husband.

"Nonsense!" he replied. "You women are certainly peculiar creatures. Here you spent two or three weeks of feverish activity securing some young woman to take care of that child, and, after you have looked up her references, talked with her former employers, and decided that she would suit you, the first time that you give her the opportunity to indulge in any responsibility you begin worrying and have a mild case of hysterics. If you are not satisfied that the nurse is good, discharge her; but for heaven's sake do not spoil your visit to Swantown with any continuous presentiments of coming disaster. Remember that I, the head of the household, still remain at my post of duty."

"Yes," replied Charlotte, "with your office mail, and all the other things that keep you so busy downtown, keeping an eye on that baby! I declare, I really felt a moment ago as if I could not leave him for an instant, and if mama wasn't so urgent to know all about

our new home I should not think of going; but you may be sure I shall be back the first thing to-morrow."

"Have you told the nurse what you wanted her to do?"

"Yes; but I will tell her over again. Hilda!"

The door opened and the nurse appeared. The baby was sleeping in the rear bedroom.

"Now, Hilda," said Mrs. Von Blumer, "you understand perfectly what is to be done?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You understand how the milk is to be pasteurized? Remember, if it is heated too much, it changes the constituents. Be very careful about the temperature of the room. Open the window to-night to the place I have marked with a pencil. If the temperature goes down ten degrees by the thermometer outside of the window, raise the window one-half an inch. Do not forget to give the baby his bath at half-past four, and be sure to dry him off well. Do not fail to take the temperature of the water before you put him in; and, Hilda, be sure that he is well wrapped up. I want you to keep him outdoors as much as possible all day, and do not leave him a single minute. But if it rains,

bring him right in, of course. If he fusses, or you think there is anything the matter with him, telephone immediately to Mr. Von Blumer. Remember to change his shirt at night when you put him into bed, and please be careful and get the right weight. You know, there are two weights, the medium and the heavy. Use the medium for night. Feel of his feet and see whether they are warm. If he fusses—oh, dear! I've said that already. But you'd better give him his bottle of hot water. Be sure and don't have it too hot, and boil the nipples, before you put them on the bottle, and turn them inside out. I have heard of dreadful things happening just because the nipples were not properly adjusted. And, Hilda, be sure and put the baby's little jacket on, underneath his coat, before you take him out—you know, the pink jacket—and don't forget his leggings; but be careful and don't let him get overheated—he might catch cold. Oh, dear! there are so many other things to think of; but, Hilda, you will do the best you can, won't you?"

"Yes, Hilda, you will do the best you can, won't you?" said Von Blumer, with a slight touch of satirical reiteration in his voice.

"Yes, ma'am," said Hilda, nodding her head, with a bright smile. "Do not be anxious, ma'am; I will look after the baby all the time."

"Well, that's splendid!" said Charlotte, breathing a sigh of relief. "Now I think that I may go and feel quite easy. Don't you think I may go and feel quite easy?" she repeated, anxiously.

"Why, of course," said Von Blumer. "Why not? You might just as well get used to it now as at any other time. When we get settled in Tiverdale you'll want to shop for days together and leave him home."

After this Mrs. Von Blumer said good-bye to her infant son. The harrowing details of this incident are omitted.

At the railway station she admonished her husband again not to be away from the office any longer than possible. As soon, however, as Von Blumer got downtown, he forgot all about the baby, his wife, and everything else but certain important matters which were then on the top of his consciousness.

The time sped rapidly until twelve o'clock, when Major Buddway dropped in for a few moments' chat.

"Well, my boy, how goes the battle? Speak-

ing for myself, I have just had a conference with Holton and the rest of his rascally gang, and they have been trying to put through a monumental deal, which they told me they would let me in on, but I will be hanged if I can see my way clear."

"What's the matter?" said Von Blumer. "Isn't it straight?"

"Is anything straight," said Major Buddway, "within a radius of a hundred miles of Wall Street?"

"But you might just as well take your share of the profits, whatever they are. If you don't, they'll go to some other man."

"That may be; but, my boy, I came into the world with a New England conscience. I suppose I am old-fashioned. I don't mind getting the better of another man on a straight business proposition; but when it comes to buying out a railway or an industrial, fixing up the capital stock to suit myself, putting it on the market at a fictitious price, and then buying it back again when the market has dropped out—that is a game which I do not care for. My wants at my time of life are few and simple, and I have no special desire to augment my fame by becoming an amateur philanthropist with

money that has been taken out of somebody else's pocket."

"My dear Major," said Von Blumer, "I am glad that there are a few men like you left in the world. At the same time, don't take the situation too seriously. Now, if I were in your place, I'd go in with Holton and his crowd. After all, they're not so bad as they are painted. Dear me! there may be a lot in it."

"Never!" exclaimed the Major.

"But the deal may be a strictly legitimate one. You can't lose anything."

The Major lowered his voice.

"Ah! Can't I?" he whispered. "That's it, my boy. They want me to put in twenty-five thousand. That's different, isn't it? Why, they'd fleece me alive. No, sir. I guess I'll hang on to what I've got."

Von Blumer laughed.

"Maybe," he said, "that, after all, honesty is the best policy, especially when you have to put up your hard-earned savings to prove it isn't. Major, I wronged you. You are right."

"I know a thing or two. By the way, how is the baby?"

"Well, the baby is at present running the house in his mother's absence."

"Who has him in charge?"

"The nurse."

"H'm!" said the Major. "Where did you get her?"

"Why, we got her at an agency, I believe."

"Well, I don't care where she came from," said the Major; "but I'll bet a red apple that she isn't any good, on general principles."

Von Blumer leaned back with a look of curiosity.

"What makes you think that?" he said.

"Since I have been living in the city I have been walking around a good deal and seeing things. You must remember that there was a time when I raised a family of my own; when we didn't put on quite so much style as people do now; when we didn't have candles on the table at night for dinner; when the waitresses didn't wear white filigree-work on their hair; when there wasn't such a thing known as a butter-ball; when the children sat around a big table, and the old man carved a portion for each and it was handed around; when the principal etiquette that was preserved was to have a clean face and clean hands and not to eat with your knife; when mothers took care of their children, and when the children got to be nu-

merous they took care of themselves. Now, I don't mean to say for a minute that you couldn't find fault with things in those days; but, from what I have seen recently, I do not believe things are much better now. To my mind, the nurses that we pick up in these so-called intelligence offices are mighty poor substitutes for mothers and elder sisters. I walk through the park every morning, and sometimes on Sunday I will spend half a day there, and when I see the gossip and idling and the absolute indifference which the average nurse pays to the child she has in her baby carriage, it makes me smile at the simplicity of mothers. Of course, I realize that things are different and we must have them, but they'll bear watching, all right. Well, I just dropped in to say how-do-you-do, but I must get back to the bank. There may be something in that deal, after all—if I can get in without putting up any cash."

What Major Buddway said to Von Blumer produced a strange effect upon that individual. It made him restless and uneasy. He got up; went and ate his lunch; came back to the office; tried to pick up the current of his work. But it was all useless, and finally, moved by an irre-

sistible impulse, he dropped everything and hurriedly started uptown to his home. Why he did it, he declared afterward, he never really knew, as, under ordinary circumstances, anything that Major Buddway or any one else might say would not have induced him to leave a very important piece of work.

He arrived home at three o'clock; it was Monday—wash-day.

Hilda, the nurse, was on first-rate terms with Nora, the cook. They were fond of going out together. It seemed, therefore, a desirable thing for her to do, instead of taking the baby out in the park in his carriage, to transmit him to the roof, where there was an easy-chair, and where she could read an exciting dime novel; while Nora occasionally came forth from the laundry-room and the two girls indulged in a talk.

The roof of the apartment house in which the Von Blumers lived was quite an affair. Around its edges were stone copings, which occasionally fell away, forming gaps, so that anybody could look down on to the street below.

At three o'clock Hilda, the nurse, had arrived at the point in her story where Lord

Hallowell was eloping with Hazel Ballentine, the queen of the Crystal Flower Factory.

The baby, on his part, was just beginning to develop an abnormal curiosity. He had been put down on a blanket, where he was supposed to be indulging in an afternoon nap; but he had succeeded in crawling away from this over the gravel roof, and, having his freedom, had made a bee-line for the nearest gap in the stone coping which overlooked the street.

It was rather a striking picture: the blue sky overhead, with the sun shining down on a great city; fleecy clouds in the distance, wandering aimlessly and incontinently through the sky: below, the hum, distant and reverberant, of the city streets, droning and muttering discordantly; the preoccupied nurse, feverish over her chapter; the distant drying-room, where the cook, who had disappeared, might at any instant return; the baby, cooing softly to himself, as he sat swaying gently back and forth on the perilous edge of the roof, seventy feet above the hard pavements below. There were infinitesimal instants of time, fractions of a second, when he seemed to topple, and his little life hung in the balance, as if the fates were deciding whether or not he should shortly be-

come only a happy memory or remain a chubby reality. After all, among the millions who are swept away in the continuous cycle of time, what mattered one little life?

At Swantown, Mrs. Von Blumer at this moment was sitting on the piazza with her mother, merrily discussing the trimming of a new hat, and whether it would be possible to wear a certain combination of colors that had been suggested to her by a particular saleslady with whom she had come to be on familiar terms.

Von Blumer had looked in his apartment for the baby, and had come out again to the elevator; and Albert, the elevator boy, had told him that only an hour before he had taken Hilda and her charge up to the roof. And so Von Blumer, in search of her, stepped out into the broad glare upon this brilliant and dramatic scene of life and death.

He took in the situation in a glance, as if every atom in his body was a point of consciousness and the contact had been made everywhere at once.

To attract the attention of the nurse meant that she would start up toward baby, probably with a scream. To wait was just as bad. Von Blumer turned from the door, from which he

had stepped, and raised his hand to Albert, who was just on the point of going back; something in his face—a look, a power, a psychic something—held the boy as if he had been gripped in a vise.

And then occurred one of those peculiar hypnotic movements which, if we did but know it, is undoubtedly the direct result of some great natural law, of which we most of the time are but dimly conscious, only rising stridently to the surface during supreme moments. It was Albert who could save the child, for he was the only one who could approach the nurse without startling her.

Whether the boy himself had the intelligent initiative to have been capable of what he did, no one knows; he said afterward that he could not account for his action. It is sufficient to know that Von Blumer's mind worked upon him; that he had to do as Von Blumer thought, and that, in the moments that followed, he was in reality a mere automaton. He stepped out upon the roof swiftly and boldly. The first thing he did was to whistle very slowly and unconcernedly. Hilda looked up at him as one awakened from a trance. He smiled, drawing near to her; and then, without wavering or

hesitation, his arm shot out and landed upon the girl's jaw; for Albert, in his idle moments, was something of an amateur pugilist, and he knew the place to strike.

The girl dropped.

The baby, unconscious of this tragedy going on before him, was intent only on a jagged piece of pottery that he had picked up near the edge of the roof, and was trying to focus his eyes upon it.

Albert picked up his rattle, which lay on the side of the impromptu bed which the nurse had previously arranged.

Nearer and nearer he crept to the baby, shaking the rattle slightly and whistling. It was a fortunate thing that Albert was more or less a familiar object to the baby, who had often smiled at him as he took him down in the elevator; and now the baby smiled once more as he saw Albert approaching. Nearer and nearer crept the boy, until with a sudden leap he fastened his hands upon the child's clothes.

At this moment Mrs. Caterby was saying to her daughter: "If you take my advice, my dear, you will wait until you are settled in Tiverdale before you get your new grenadine."

As to Von Blumer, he rushed forward and

threw his arms around Albert and the baby and held them both in a fierce grip. He said but little; one never does during moments of reaction.

As to the nurse, the first thing she did when she came to was to threaten vociferously to get a policeman to arrest her whilom friend for assault and battery; but a little persuasion on the part of Von Blumer made her change her mind, and she was permitted to go, with her money, peacefully but tearfully.

The next morning, when Mrs. Von Blumer arrived at her apartment, she found her husband down on the sidewalk in front, wheeling the baby carriage.

She greeted him hastily, for her sensitive eye had already gathered that the baby's blankets were not arranged with that precision and feminine touch that she had insisted upon with the nurse, and there were other evidences of masculinity which put her at once into a state of feverish excitement.

"What does this mean?" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you meet me at the station, and where is Hilda?"

At the mention of Hilda's name Von Blumer laughed loud enough to attract the attention of

two spinster ladies who were passing rigidly by on their afternoon calls.

"Hilda?" he said. "Hilda is only a pleasant memory. Poor, dear Hilda! She was a nice girl, was Hilda—a sweet, lovable, conscientious girl; but she was not quite up to her job. Now, what do you suppose Hilda did?"

Charlotte looked at him with the utmost anxiety. "I know," she said; "she left him alone in the park and talked with the policeman."

"Worse still."

"Well, she let the wind blow on him at night and he got cold. Has he caught cold? He looks as if he might. Dear old sing!"

"No. Try once more."

"She went off and left him in charge of the cook, and you came back and caught her."

Von Blumer roared again.

"In my opinion, the cook can be trusted with the baby very much better than Hilda. But that is neither here nor there, now; you wait till you know what she did—prepare yourself for a terrible shock. Of course, there was nothing for me to do but discharge her. I fired her on the spot."

"Quick! don't keep me in suspense. What was it?"

Von Blumer's face grew sad. "Simply this; that girl was so absolutely thoughtless and indifferent to that child's welfare that when she gave him his bath yesterday afternoon the water was four degrees cooler than it ought to have been by your directions. Now, my dear, what do you think of that?"

Charlotte looked at him scornfully.

"Well, Henry," she said, "if that's all you discharged that girl for you certainly ought to be ashamed of yourself."

And her husband replied, humbly:

"Well, dear, I'm sorry, but I thought I'd better be on the safe side."

XII

IN WHICH CERTAIN FINANCIAL OPERATIONS ARE DISCUSSED

IN the meantime, Major Buddway had not been idle. Reports of his "deal" in the Street came to Von Blumer from outside sources. The Major himself had little to say about it. He knew enough to keep his mouth closed when necessary. He hinted, however, at certain possibilities.

"The Major," said Von Blumer to Charlotte, "is very foxy. He's making money. I wouldn't be surprised if he turned up ten thousand on his deal."

"He always was shrewd."

"Well, he's no shrewder than I am," replied Von Blumer, hotly. Prosperity was beginning to tell on that young man.

"If he can make money in Wall Street," he added, "I guess I can. I was talking with

Bilter to-day. He's in a broker's office—you've heard me speak of him—smart fellow—and he told me he had just made several thousand by a lucky turn."

"You never do anything like that."

Von Blumer elevated his eyebrows, and leaned back in his chair with an expression of supreme disdain.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "If that isn't just like a woman! Just because I grub along in my slow, industrious, painstaking way; just because I'm not a gambler, a spendthrift, and am not taking the bread out of the mouths of widows and orphans, why, you turn on me—you chide me with my incompetence!"

"Nonsense! I haven't said anything of the sort. I don't know anything about it. What did you mention the matter for?"

Von Blumer ignored her question. He was absorbed in a philosophic reflection; his volatile mind, stung by her opposition, took on the hue of certain platitudes that oftentimes we express without feeling them. He turned to his wife, his face shining with the beatitude felt by a man who is thus suddenly elevated to the sermon level.

"Perhaps," he said, "you don't realize what

this Wall Street business means. Well, it's death and destruction! It's sapping the life-blood of the nation. A whole gang of desirable young men, the bulwark of our country, are going to ruin. I see it about me all the time. It's fearful!"

"Your friend Bilter evidently doesn't feel that way about it. Isn't he the one you spoke of as being such an ardent church-member?"

"Bilter," said Von Blumer, earnestly, "is exceptionally situated. You see, he is on the inside. He never does anything big; but he knows some of the big ones. He is right next to them. He simply takes advantage of a few things he hears. Besides, he is old enough not to have his head turned. Then, he never mentions the matter—that is, except to his intimate friends."

"Why don't you try your hand at it? You are as old as he is. There's no chance of losing, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, not in his case. You see, you buy when they are low. Then the boys get together and give things a boost. Oh, it's dead easy—a sure thing. Perhaps I will. I don't know that there would be any harm—in my case. I'm too level-headed to get caught. All

ou need in the game is a little judgment, a ittle nerve. I've still got that five thousand."

The next day, when Von Blumer came home, iis step was a trifle more elastic than usual. There was a subdued gleam in his eye as he issed his wife.

After dinner was over he patted her confidenially on the shoulder.

"Can you keep a secret?"

She looked at him reproachfully. As if she —being the woman he knew her to be— ouldn't keep a secret! As if that hadn't been lemonstrated!

"My dear girl, prepare yourself for a shock. 'm making a fortune!"

"A fortune?"

"Well, of course, in a limited way. I'm conervative. I'm not rushing into a thing with ny eyes shut. But when you have a dead sure hing, play it hard! That's my motto."

"My dear, you haven't been—speculating?"

In reply, her husband slapped his hand on iis knee. He laughed heartily.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "that's good! Me speculating! Not much!" As if that iadn't been demonstrated!

"What have you been doing?"

"Now, my pet, just sit down and listen. And above all things, don't jump to any conclusions. Yesterday I went in with the boys on a little—investment."

"I hope it wasn't a gold mine. I'm afraid of gold mines. You know, father——"

"Ha! That shows how little you know. Perhaps you don't know it, but there's been more good, solid, hard cash made in gold mines than in anything else. But never mind. You wouldn't understand the details if I talked for a century."

Charlotte's face blanched.

"Have you bought a gold mine?" she faltered.

"Certainly not. All you've got to do is to remember the word 'Acacia'—that's all. Yesterday it was selling at twenty-four. To-day it has moved up to thirty; and there's absolutely no telling where it will stop. Bilter put me on. There's just a few of us, but we are 'way, 'way inside."

"Acacia! Why, was that what Major Buddway was talking about last night? He said it was good for something—par, I think he said."

"Exactly."

"How did he know about it?"

Von Blumer leaned forward, mysteriously. He whispered:

"It's known only to a few, a select few. Of course, in a week or so—when it's too late—everybody will know it. Nothing like getting in on the ground floor, eh?"

"But suppose it should go down?"

Von Blumer chuckled.

"Acacia go down—with me and the rest of the insiders back of it? Huh!"

"Have you bought much of it?"

Von Blumer's voice lowered.

"No," he whispered. "Don't mention it. I'm almost ashamed to say how little I've got. A mere nothing—five hundred shares. Oh, if I only had my nerve with me yesterday!"

Charlotte looked at him keenly.

"I don't know anything about it," she said, anxiously. "I suppose it's all right, if you say so. But what do they mean by margin? Buying on a margin—isn't that it? I heard father say once never to do it. They say it's wrong—I hope you didn't."

Von Blumer's face grew solemn and earnest.

"Nothing worse!" he cried. "That's what ruins 'em. There's only one safe thing to do,

as Bilter says—buy it outright, put it away in your pill-box, and forget it. Then you can't lose. A little cool judgment and steady nerve, a clear head in buying, and—well, maybe millions will result."

"And you did that, did you?"

"In my case it wasn't necessary. You must remember, my dear, that I am strictly on the inside. We don't wait for a thing to happen—we create it. It's a terrible thing for these poor duffers who don't know, isn't it? But for us—well, we play the cards. I can't wait until to-morrow."

The next day Von Blumer slipped into the house so noiselessly that his wife scarcely heard him come up to her. He was calm—unnaturally calm. He was also pleasant—unnaturally pleasant. They talked of many things.

"I thought," said Charlotte, at last, "that I would get a new hat."

Her husband's face burst into a smile.

"That's great!" he cried. "A hat—I like that! But I don't believe it."

"What do you mean?"

"The idea of your getting a new hat is a great joke. It amuses me immensely. I don't believe it. You'd rather wear your old one.

I know you. When you get new things you don't wear 'em. You stick to the old until I'm positively ashamed of you."

"But——"

"All I can say is that I hope you will get a good hat. And for heaven's sake, get a decent one. Get two or three."

Von Blumer's imagination, once it became excited, stopped at nothing.

"Every well-dressed woman," he continued, "ought to have at least half a dozen hats. And I want you to buy some clothes. Go to a half-respectable place. Have something that looks well. It's your duty to be well dressed. I demand it of you." He put his hand on her shoulder. "My dear girl, we've been living in a rut. Now, let's broaden out. I've been looking at autos all the afternoon—ever since three o'clock. I suppose I'll have to come to a French car. I understand they are the best. And we must go to Europe; a leisurely stroll, mind you—no hurried trips for me. We'll take the baby, too." He turned and looked around. "Do you know, my dear," he observed critically, "that everything in this house looks shabby? It's positively disreputable. When we move to Tiverdale, we'll get an entire new outfit. We'll

buy a house—one that suits us in every respect."

Charlotte looked at him anxiously. She was a young wife. It was quite natural for her to be alarmed. She had not yet learned that there are some temperaments, like Von Blumer's, where the mind may expand so rapidly with an idea as to convey an absolute certainty of unstability, and yet have ballast enough to bring it eventually safe into port.

Now, there was a strange glint in his eye that she didn't like.

"Don't you think, dear, that you'd better sell out?"

"Sell out? Why, what do you mean?" said Von Blumer, as if the subject she had broached was the last thing in the world he was thinking of. "Oh, you refer to Acacia?" He waved his arm. "Oh, that little matter! I think not. *I think not!* You see, I know more about those things than you. I don't think I shall sell out quite yet—not while I'm making a thousand a day. Of course, that isn't much; still, it's better than nothing. If I hadn't been such an infernal ass I'd have gotten more. It makes me sick when I think of it. I might have known. But I may as well be philosophical."

During the next few days Charlotte learned to gage the stock-market by her husband's actions. When he was sentimental, verging on peevishness, it was going down. When he was haughty and distant, it was going up. His spirits soared and dropped with Acacia.

Little by little, however, he seemed to grow more serious. One day he spoke of "those devilish crop reports"; on another of "tight" money, and on another of "distant war rumors" which for some unknown reason appeared to be doing damage to home industries. On the seventh afternoon, as she was engaged in a little shopping, she heard a boy calling an extra. She caught the words "Wall Street," and hastily bought the paper. Her worst fears were confirmed as she read the fatal headline: "A Crash in the Street."

She waited to learn no more—indeed, the most intimate perusal of the financial column would have left her no wiser—but hurried homeward. It was growing dark as she entered the apartment and made her way upstairs. Suddenly she heard her husband's voice at the telephone. She paused outside the door until he had finished, and then entered the room.

"You did it!" he cried.

"Did what?"

"Never mind! You're responsible for it, all right. I might have known, when I took your advice, that I'd be wiped out. I knew some time or other that you'd get me in a box like this!"

"What have I done?"

"You've done everything. You enticed me into Wall Street, didn't you, with its blood-thirsty gang of thieves and cut-throats? Didn't you persuade me a week or so ago, against my better judgment, to go in and gamble?"

"But, my dear, I didn't want you to—I begged you not to."

"Begged nothing! Didn't you taunt me with the fact that I never made any money? What would any decent man do under such circumstances? It's the same old story—ruined by a woman! And I'll bet you've been throwing away money shopping all day."

Mrs. Von Blumer's love for her erring husband rose in a mighty wave. She went over and put her arms about him.

"Don't you care a bit, dear. It doesn't make any difference if you've lost every cent. We can get along."

Von Blumer dropped into a chair.

"The Major warned me," he said, brokenly.

"Why, I thought you said he——"

"No—he didn't. I may as well make a clean breast of it. He told me to be careful. He said to look out. He knows more than I do."

He straightened up.

"What are we going to do?" he asked.

Charlotte smiled reassuringly. She did not seem to be disconcerted.

"How bad is it, dear?"

"Why, I put up that five thousand I made out of that invention—and they sold me out. Besides," he lowered his voice, "I borrowed a couple of thousand from the Major. He doesn't need it. He can wait. But, of course, it must be paid."

"Is that all?"

"Everything."

His wife looked at him, sorrowfully.

"It was wrong of you to borrow money."

"Don't I know it!"

"You'll never do it again, will you?"

"Never—not if I starve. I suppose it's a good thing it happened. Every man, I suppose, has to learn that lesson once in his life. But, my dear, in the meantime what are we to do?"

In reply, Charlotte went over to her desk.

"I think I can help you out," she said.

"You?"

"Yes!"

Von Blumer sprang up.

"Not from your father! I'll never do that!"

"You don't have to. I suppose I may as well tell you that I sold out that invention for ten thousand dollars and a small part of the future royalties—whatever they may be. Now, I want you to pay back the Major at once."

She calmly handed him a check.

Von Blumer, almost too overcome to speak, got up and hugged her frantically.

"Charlotte," he whispered, "do you love me as much as ever?"

"Yes, you silly—more—only promise me one thing. Don't try to get that money back, will you? Papa says it never pays."

"Never!"

"Now go and pay back the Major at once—the first thing in the morning."

Obedient to her desire, Von Blumer lost no time. Armed with a check to the Major's order, he dropped in upon that able financier.

The Major's face was solemn.

"Ah, Henry," he said, "I was just going to

telephone you. I hate to do it, but the fact is—well, have you any money in your clothes?"

"Certainly," replied Von Blumer, handing him the check.

Then he looked at him, wonderingly.

"I thought, Major," he said, "you made ten thousand in that deal you spoke of."

The Major got up and closed the door.

"I did," he whispered, solemnly. "But, my boy, I was fool enough to drop it all in that damned old Acacia!"

Von Blumer smiled wisely. With as fatherly gesture as he could command—considering that he was twenty years younger—he put his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Major," he said, sympathetically, "when you are as old as I am you'll know better than to get caught like that."

XIII

IN WHICH TWO VISITORS APPEAR UPON THE SCENE

"TIVERALE," said Von Blumer, "unites all the comforts of town with the joys of the country. There are no shops in Tiverdale; obliging tradespeople wait upon one deferentially at the back door. The train service is excellent; the people are select; the golf course is ideal; one may be independent and yet social; in fact, Tiverdale, as a place to live in, is unsurpassed."

At the end of a week they were fairly settled in their new home, a frame house garnished by real trees, with garden and other rural possibilities in the rear, a piazza to sit on, a bathtub to sit in, a library, a den and other accessories so necessary to a modern housekeeper.

The price also seemed reasonable compared with what they had been paying. Von Blumer

discovered afterwards, however, that this was only apparent. But, on the whole, it was a pleasant and profitable change.

It was Saturday morning. Major Buddway, who was out spending Sunday, was upstairs in the room set aside for him, putting on his country clothes. The month was May; and Von Blumer and his wife were sitting on the piazza, enjoying their first rest and fresh air.

"This is certainly the real thing," said Von Blumer, as he puffed his cigar contentedly. "By the way, has any one called yet?"

"Yes. Two people—the Curdes, and the Linnets."

"Well, well! I guess we'll be somebody, after all. Glad we're getting acquainted. They told me this was a friendly place. Better not lose any time, my dear, in returning those calls."

Charlotte sniffed contemptuously.

"I'm not going to return them," she said decisively.

"What! You don't mean it! Here we are, strangers in a strange land. Two kind ladies, whose hearts go out to us, come to welcome us to Tiverdale. That's what I call real human feeling. And you declare you won't return their calls! Can it be possible that you are de-

veloping into a snob? What was the matter with them, anyway?"

"They seemed pleasant."

"They must have been pleasant, or they wouldn't have taken the trouble to come."

"They were—too pleasant."

"Come, now, what do you mean?"

Mrs. Von Blumer drew herself together, and unconsciously straightened out her skirt with that indescribably feminine touch indicating that her mind was made up on one point, at least.

"Don't you know," she said, "that when you move into a strange place the people that call upon you first are the very ones you don't want to know? It's a great help, too, to have them do it."

"I suppose I'm dense," replied Von Blumer, "but I don't understand. So far as I can see, these two ladies who have favored us are the only ones, so far, in the whole place who have displayed any real human sympathy. I shall always remember them for it. *You* may be ungrateful and rude, but I shan't."

"All right. I'll remember that. Cultivate the Linnets and Curdes, if you will; but, remember, in about six months from now, when

they are infesting us and camping out regularly on our piazza, that it is you who must entertain them, and not I."

"How's that?"

Charlotte sighed.

"Men *are* dense about some things. You think you can reason, but you never seem to arrive anywhere. After we have been here a year or so, do you suppose we will be looking up every newcomer in order to get acquainted? I hope not. We'll wait and see first whether they are worth while knowing, and will be too busy with the people we know. The first people who call upon you are always the ones who have time on their hands; and why? Simply because they don't get on with all the others. That's why they must be avoided. Wait until we've been here six months or a year. *Then* the people who come will be worth while. Do you see that?"

A glimmering of the truth began to enter Von Blumer's mind.

"Why, of course!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that before? I *am* a fool about some things. But I'm a sociable creature. I can't wait. I'm just teeming with good-fellowship. Can't we hasten things a little?"

"Well, there's the church."

There was a pause.

"Of course," said Von Blumer, at last, "we must connect ourselves with the church. I suppose," he added, "that you want to go to the Episcopal Church?"

"I certainly do. It was the church that I was brought up in, and I couldn't very well change now, if I wanted to. Then, there's Bobbie."

Von Blumer rose.

"I suppose you are aware," he said, "that I was brought up in the Congregational Church. Mind you, I haven't anything against the Episcopal. The sermons are poor, as a rule, and it's tiresome saying the same things over and over; but if you want to go to the Episcopal, you can. *I'm* going to the Congregational."

His wife looked at him in the utmost amazement.

"I never heard anything like that!" she cried. "Why, it's been all I could do to get you to go to *any* church in town."

"Nonsense! I've always been willing. Of course, at times——"

"*About* every Sunday, I should say."

"Well, I have to work hard."

"But why do you now take such an interest?"

"Things are different. In a place like this——"

At this moment a step was heard on the sidewalk below. A stocky, business-looking man, clean-shaven, with a pair of unusually keen eyes, stepped on the piazza.

"Good-day! I hope I'm not intruding?"

"Not at all, sir," said Von Blumer, advancing and holding out his hand. "This is—er——"

"Here is my card, sir—Mr. Boulten. I'm the Congregational minister."

Charlotte came forward.

"So nice of you to call on us," she said, with a smile. "Take this seat. Do you know, my husband and I were just discussing the subject of the church!"

"Were you, indeed?" said Dr. Boulten. "How fortunate that I should arrive at this moment! I hope you have come to some decision."

"Well, no, we haven't," said Von Blumer, breaking in.

Mrs. Von Blumer gave him a warning glance, but he was oblivious.

"You see, Mr. Boulten, Mrs. Von Blumer was brought up in the Episcopal Church, and I —well, I've gone to the Congregational. Now, I'm rather liberal in my views. I don't think it really makes much difference. What do you think?"

This was rather a stumper to the Rev. Dr. Boulten. He wasn't used to such direct questions. But he took the hurdle gracefully.

"One of my best friends," he said, "is Mr. Qualter, pastor of the Episcopal Church. He is undoubtedly doing a good work in our little community. I myself, I am happy to say, am liberal also. We are all of us striving for the same end. Without being at all prejudiced, I think I may assure you that the best people go to my church."

"There!" exclaimed Von Blumer to his wife. "What did I tell you? I knew it. My dear, we must go to Dr. Boulten's church."

Charlotte smiled sweetly—one of those lovely womanish smiles that means deadly opposition.

"It's *such* a hard matter to decide," she said. "Mr. Von Blumer naturally wants to go where he has been used to going, and I feel much the

same. I fear, my dear Dr. Boulten, I shall have to decide the matter for myself. So kind of you to come and see us."

The Rev. Dr. Boulten had not been calling on ladies all his ministerial life without learning the power of certain feminine vocal intonations. He recognized the note of dismissal, and prepared to go. He also saw in the distance approaching the tall form of his friend, the Episcopal rector.

"Not at all," he said. "Do, I beg of you, as your own hearts dictate. In the meantime you might glance over this." He handed Mrs. Von Blumer a neatly printed prospectus which set forth the history and condition of his own church, with a statement of the debt, and in another moment he was gone.

"The idea!" exclaimed Charlotte, quivering with indignation. "Why, it was really nothing better than a bid. Think of his offering as an inducement the fact that we might meet the best people in his church!"

"Why shouldn't he?" retorted Von Blumer. "I don't see any harm in that. If he gets us to go to his church, what difference does it make how he does it? This is an age of business, and churches, to succeed, must be con-

ducted on business principles, just like anything else. Hello! Here comes Mr. Qualter."

That gentleman, tall and ascetic, now stepped upon the piazza.

"This is Mr. Qualter, I believe," said Von Blumer, repeating his former politeness. "Delighted to see you, sir. My wife, sir. She's been going to your church, sir."

Mr. Qualter shook hands all around and then sank back into his chair. Von Blumer promptly offered him a cigar, which he accepted as promptly.

"You're a church-woman," he said to Mrs. Von Blumer.

"Well, yes. I've always gone. I was confirmed when a girl."

"I am so glad. Frequently I call on strangers and make mistakes."

"How so?"

"Why, they belong to some other denomination, and they are, perhaps, a trifle rude."

Von Blumer laughed.

"I can't understand that," he said. "Now, I've always gone—when I *have* gone—to the Congregational Church, but I don't see what difference that makes. We're both good fellows, I hope, and I'm glad to see you. By the

way, we were just discussing the matter before you came. We didn't know which church to go to."

"You mean," said Charlotte, pointedly, "that *you* were undecided."

"Of course," said Mr. Qualter, "I really don't suppose—I like to be entirely fair—that it makes a vast difference. We are all striving for the same end. But, my dear Mr. Von Blumer, you know, of course—you must realize—that the best people go to our church."

Mrs. Von Blumer gave her husband another warning look, but it was no use. That gentleman was incorrigible.

"That's strange," he said; "Dr. Boulten, who was good enough to call upon us to-day, told me the best people went to his church."

Mr. Qualter laughed outright. He appreciated keenly a good joke.

"That's splendid!" he cried. "Well, the fact is, that we both have good people. But I think," smiling a slightly superior smile, "that possibly among my members will be found more of the really desirable families, although it is undeniable that the money lies with him. I trust," he added, warmly, "that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow."

"To be sure," said Charlotte.

"Well, yes; no doubt," said Von Blumer, vaguely.

Shortly after this the clergyman withdrew, and the matter being under discussion between themselves until the next morning, Von Blumer gave in and told his wife to do as she pleased, and he would be satisfied.

But he had by no means settled the matter to his own satisfaction, and after breakfast on Sunday morning, when he and Major Buddway were sitting together, smoking, he startled that gentleman by asking abruptly:

"Major, what would you do if you were I—go to church or not?"

"State the question more definitely," said the Major, who was exceedingly punctilious about some matters, and especially where the nature of the subject was polemical.

"Why, it's simply this: When I have gone, it's been to the Congregational. But Charlotte is an Episcopalian. When we were in town it didn't matter so much. But I suppose we ought to decide the thing now. She wants to go to the Episcopal Church. Shall we go there or not?"

There was a pause; the Major was reflecting.

"Church!"

Finally he put his hand on Von Blumer's shoulder.

"My dear friend," he said, "don't make any mistake. Go to church by all means, and go to the church your wife wants you to. It's the only thing to do."

"But suppose I don't believe in everything that's taught?"

"Don't let that worry you a bit. You just go. Consider that your boy will soon be growing up, and that you must look after him. It's your duty; there must be no division in the family. You must be unanimous. Everybody ought to go to church."

Von Blumer sprang up.

"By Jove! Major, you're right! You've stepped in just at the right moment in our career. I'll go right upstairs and tell Charlotte."

Thirty minutes later he and Mrs. Von Blumer appeared on the stairs. As they descended into the hall and went out on to the piazza they saw the Major, who sat reading the paper, and who still had on his négligé suit.

"Come, Major," said Von Blumer, looking

at his watch, "you've only just time to dress for church, if you hurry."

"Church!"

"Yes. Aren't you going to church with us?"

Major Buddway's face fell.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, in astonishment, "are you?"

"Why, certainly. What did you think I was going to do?"

The Major stepped out on the piazza, his arm waving around the sky-line.

"Why," he exclaimed, "on a beautiful day like this, I thought, of course, I could count on you to play golf with me!"

XIV

IN WHICH THE ANIMAL KINGDOM IS DRAWN UPON TO HEIGHTEN THE JOYS OF LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

AFTER one has been cooped up in the city for a year, the sudden transition to fenceless lawns, to companionable trees and to wide, open spaces, is like undergoing a period of convalescence. The patient—if so he may be termed—literally kicks up his heels and shouts aloud. Everything, no matter how slight, seems good to him, and he begins forthwith to plunge into all those rural dissipations that later on are tempered by the wisdom of time.

For Von Blumer the church question had been settled; he would go when there were no visitors and the weather was bad. In the meantime he made a mental reservation that he would pray for rain, and have Major Buddway out as often as possible to play golf—un-

til, at any rate, new friends grew. For, in view of Charlotte's feminine wisdom, it was not wise to "get on" in Tiverdale too quickly. The Curdes and the Linnets came and went, and then began that period of waiting for the time to arrive when their social position would be settled upon a firm basis.

"I hope," said Von Blumer, one morning, "that nobody will come to see us for a long time. It gives me leisure to enjoy my own home. I have several little ideas I want to carry out. For one thing, I've just been looking over the ground."

"What ground?" said Charlotte.

He swept his hand grandly toward the rear of the house. "Ours," he said.

Mrs. Von Blumer, with that sense of coming disaster which was beginning to be second nature to her, had suspected that something was in the air, and when Von Blumer made his announcement she involuntarily started back and looked at him with a touch of genuine distress in her voice.

"I hope," she said, "that you haven't undertaken anything without consulting me."

Von Blumer got up and restlessly paced the floor.

"It's no use," he said. "Here I have been for ten days laying out a plan by which you are to enjoy all the benefits of a life in the country, and you immediately begin to suspect me of something horrible. Do you realize, my dear, that Bobby is now beginning to walk, and that in order to develop within him those humanitarian instincts which are an absolute necessity for a well-rounded human being, we must begin to have pets?"

"Pets!" exclaimed Charlotte. "Good gracious! You haven't ordered any, have you?"

For some moments her husband was silent. Then he sank back meditatively in his chair.

"The primitive man," he said, "roved the forests with his trusty dog by his side and led his cattle on pilgrimages. Don't you know, my dear girl, that cows were man's companions four thousand years before Christ—and who knows how much farther back than that! Do you suppose I am going back on them now? Not much!"

As his enthusiasm increased he got up again.

"Yes," he said, "I have the whole scheme laid out. I am going in for dogs, cows and hens. I have had enough of the hot and man-

tainted city. Necessity obliges me to live in the suburbs, where modern improvements—how I hate the word!—are still trying to sap some of our national manhood. But, at least, the domestic animals shall be with us, to uplift us and give us that primitive sense of dependence on others which is necessary for right living. Think of our little boy! I want him to get as much of a country life as is possible, and I propose to do it!"

While he had been talking, Charlotte's face had gone through all the various stages of despair. She got up and put her hand feelingly on his shoulder.

"Tell me the worst," she said. "How many dogs have you ordered?"

"Ordered! Do you suppose I get my dogs at a department store? You don't realize how difficult it is to get a good dog. It may be a matter of weeks or months. We must try experiments with them to see which is the best. I am not going to take anybody else's word for it. How can we tell what we want until we have been through the actual experience?"

"Are there many coming?" said Charlotte, nervously.

"Are there many coming?" repeated her husband. "Good gracious, yes! Now don't be alarmed," he continued. "There is only one—for the present."

"What is it?"

Von Blumer paused. He was gathering impetus to convey his idea.

"What is it?" he exclaimed. "When I tell you that the dog that I have secured is one of the finest animals that God ever made, that doesn't begin to convey my idea. I want you to understand that by an unusual combination of fortunate circumstances I was able to secure a great Dane, Montebello strain. You may not know what a Great Dane is, but——"

"The name," said Charlotte, gasping, "suggests something very large."

Heretofore she had had very little experience with animals, and especially with dogs. Her father and mother had never displayed any desire or any leanings toward the animal kingdom, and she had been brought up almost in total ignorance of the various gradations of canines. Unquestionably, she leaned too far the other way. Once when she was a child she had been knocked over by an aggressively playful Newfoundland dog, and the memory of this

catastrophe still lingered in her consciousness. The idea, therefore, of having introduced into her household a creature with whom she could have no possible sympathy was more than a calamity.

"He is large," replied Von Blumer. "I go on the principle that when you get a good dog you can't have too much of him. Think of what this means to us! No more fear of burglars—our house protected every instant of the day and night. Then, you must understand that the Great Dane is a one-man dog."

Charlotte was beginning to recover.

"I suppose you mean," she said, "that he devours only one person at a time. Excuse me, my dear; if that dog comes into the house I go out of it. I'll stand anything but that!"

"You mean to say——"

"I mean to say that I don't like dogs—at least as big as I know this dog of yours is, and I should be in mortal terror all the time. Why, he might knock Bobby over!"

Von Blumer folded his arms calmly.

"Now you have come to the vital point of this whole business. That is precisely why I got Maximillian. As a protector for the baby, there isn't anything like him; and as for knocking

him over, he is as gentle as a lamb. Why, Bobby can do anything to that dog. He can pull his tail, walk over him, poke his eyes out, take bones away from him—it makes no difference. But if anybody should go near that baby when that dog was around—well, there wouldn't be much left of him."

Von Blumer's voice became persuasive. "Now let me tell you something, my dear. You don't know anything about dogs, but I do. Trust me. If Maximillian doesn't suit us, and you feel that after he has been here a week you don't like him, we will make some other arrangement. You must remember there is a whole world of joy in store for anyone who doesn't know about dogs."

Charlotte, however, was too feminine to be lured by any such bait.

"That's all very well," she replied. "I don't care to indulge in any experiments. I am very happy as it is. I don't want to be any happier with Maximillian."

"Well, it's too late now. Here he comes."

He pointed out of the front window, and sure enough, a man appeared leading by a rope a slate-colored animal that loomed as large and seemed to be about as awkward and restless as

a conventional calf. The man indeed had some difficulty in keeping hold of the rope, the dog jumping from side to side in the excess of his energy. Von Blumer sprang down the stairs, opened the door, and in an instant there was a sound as if a regiment of cavalry greatly disordered was marching through the house.

"Here, Maxy," said Von Blumer, "come here, old man, I want to introduce you to—"

Before Charlotte could lock the door the dog had sprung upon her.

"Take him away!" she screamed, absolutely terrified.

"Why, he is only playing with you," said Von Blumer, as he grabbed Maximillian by his collar.

Charlotte was by no means a coward. If she had been, she would have fainted away on the spot. As it was, she summoned up her New England courage and pushed the dog out of the room and closed the door. Von Blumer himself was so much astonished by her action that he did perhaps the wisest thing. He awaited developments. It took his wife several moments to regain her composure. When she did, she lost no time.

"I want you to understand that if you must

exercise your fondness for animals you will have to do it outside of this house. I know, of course, what the result is going to be, and I cannot have my peace of mind disturbed within my own proper sphere."

"Do you mean to say," replied Von Blumer, "that you are going to oppose me now? Why, I never dreamed of anything like this!"

"I have been frightened almost to death by that dog, and I don't care to be subjected to anything further in the same line."

"Very well; then I'll get a smaller dog."

"No; please don't."

"But you don't understand, my dear. I'm going in for dogs. Every man ought to have a fad. Don't I work hard enough in my business? Don't you see me day after day getting thinner and weaker with the strain of this household on my shoulders? I'll be breaking down next. Why, I have to have some kind of human companionship, and do you know anything better for this purpose than a nice, lovable dog?"

"That's all right; if you want dogs and hens and cows, if you want to make a nuisance of yourself in the neighborhood and get everybody down on you, and if you have time

to take care of them all, I can't prevent your doing it. But I won't permit them in the house."

Von Blumer folded his arms.

"All right; that is a bargain. You have a right to your opinion, and I have a right to mine. I shan't be unreasonable about it. I may possibly talk about my dogs a little. I don't suppose you will object to that?"

"Not at all."

"I may possibly mention the cow occasionally; do you mind that?"

"Not a bit."

"And when I get an especially fine strain of hens, a hen that shall be the pride of the whole countryside, a hen that will cause my neighbors to look up to me with feelings of envy—if I should refer to that hen occasionally in my conversation, I don't suppose you would object?"

"No. You can talk about cows and dogs and chickens, but don't ask me to take care of them!"

Von Blumer drew himself up.

"Ask you to take care of them! When I ask you to lift a finger to shelter some of the finest dogs that I can secure in this country; when I even hint that you shall be friendly

vith some orphan dog that I have secured at ;reat expense—then may my blood run cold. I uppose you will be very glad of the protection ıfforded from burglars. I assume also that vhen it comes to delicious fresh eggs you won't)ass them by with a shudder, and as for rich :ream—no doubt you will be willing to take /our share of it."

"We get good eggs from the grocer; the nilk is all under the medical supervision of the State; and, as for burglars, I am not half as ıfraid of them as you are, and you know it."

This was a staggerer. Perhaps it was a se-:ret sense that the last statement was more true than he would care to admit, which made Von Blumer silent. At any rate, he went out to see about his Great Dane and secure temporary quarters for him in the stable.

The next day being a half-holiday, there were great doings. About noon a wagon drove up with several large rolls of wire fencing. A little later the lumberman came with lumber. These were followed by two carpenters in plain clothes, with their instruments.

Von Blumer superintended the whole thing.

First there was a dog-run; then there was a chicken-run adjacent to the dog-run, and finally

the barn was rehabilitated for its coming occupant.

Two days later an assortment of kennels appeared upon the scene. These were dispersed around the inside of the dog-run, and Von Blumer's "farm" was ready for business.

Charlotte eyed the proceedings with a quiet complacency that did not typify her real feelings.

"Well," she said, two days later at dinner, "how is the dog business?"

"The dog business never was better. I have named my kennels."

"Named your kennels?"

"Certainly. Every gentleman-farmer who has dogs has his kennels named. Besides, I propose to exhibit my dogs at the Show this fall. I expect to have our front-hall covered with the medals and ribbons my dogs have taken. Possibly you can suggest a name for the kennels."

"I'm afraid I can't think of anything foolish enough to call them."

"What do you think of Kensington? You know, that suggests Kensington Palace, and has a nice sound when you speak it. Besides, 'Kensington Kennels' is alliterative."

Charlotte smiled slyly.

"How would it do to call them the Acacia Kennels?"

Von Blumer, turning red, but ignoring this home-thrust, proceeded:

"Then I am going to have some letter paper printed with a St. Bernard saving a child from under the snow, engraved in the left-hand corner."

"That is a good idea. Why not have your picture on the other corner? You will be as famous as the chewing-gum man."

While they were talking there was a sudden commotion outside. The bell rang and there was a sound of tremendous scratching on the piazza.

"Hurrah!" cried Von Blumer, "I bet it's my Airedale terrier!" He ran outside, and, sure enough, his trusty messenger stood there tethered to a medium-sized shaggy animal with a fierce eye and mongrel face.

"What do you call it?" said Mrs. Von Blumer, who had followed.

"That is one of the finest Airedales in this country. If I should tell you the pedigree of that dog you wouldn't believe it! Look at him! Isn't he wonderfully set up? Isn't he cobby?

Gaze on that long head, that square jaw. There's a hard coat for you. And did you ever see a more perfect black saddle?"

"What is he good for?"

"He is good for everything. He is the greatest fighter in the world. He is a great hunter. Why, the German army couldn't get along without those dogs. He is a companion. Take him out, John, and put him in Kennel No. 3."

After this dogs began to arrive almost every day. Von Blumer's taste was varied. He had everything from a Maltese terrier to the Great Dane. He had long-haired and short-haired dogs. He had dogs with long tails and short legs, and short tails and long legs. He had long-eared dogs and dogs whose ears were clipped. When the final round-up came there were sixteen of them, all living together in one run, happy and vociferous.

Von Blumer began to get up early in the morning.

In the course of a few weeks the dog papers began to arrive; also circulars from various kennels in rivalry with Von Blumer. Strange-looking men paid periodical visits—awful men they were, to Charlotte—and finally at the end of six weeks came the Dog Show. All was ex-

citement for a week beforehand. There had been washing and grooming until the morning of the eventful day when the dogs went off by express.

Von Blumer rubbed his hands in glee as he started off after them.

"Can't I persuade you to come to the Show? I have fourteen entries. I expect to win everything there is. They tell me that dog Bessie is the finest thing in the world, and as for Tartar, nothing can touch him. There isn't any bulldog in the country with such a wonderful spread! Perfect rose ears! And such a marvelous turn-up and lay-back! Then look at Tannhäuser, the dachshund! His coat is like patent leather, he touches the ground everywhere, and no finer head ever came out of the kingdom of Saxony."

"Well, I wish you luck. I can only say I wish the Dog Show would last all the year, and I have no doubt the neighbors feel the same way."

For the next three days Von Blumer was very much occupied. He came home very late at night and went off very early in the morning.

Finally, on the fourth day the dogs began to arrive again, and silently they were put back into their various quarters.

"How did you come out?" said Charlotte, the next morning. "I haven't heard you mention those prizes."

Her husband looked at her in the most surprised manner.

"Prizes? Did you say prizes?"

"Yes; didn't you say you were the owner of first-prize winners?"

"Well, that makes me laugh! When you have been in the dog business as long as I have you will find that it is not going to make any difference how fine your dogs are, with the set of horrible, one-sided, narrow-minded judges they had in that Show."

"Oh, I see; the judges were to blame!"

"They certainly were. Why, they didn't give my dogs honorable mention! But I'll get even with them next year. I'll have justice if I have to buy the whole Show myself! By the way, my dear, I have got to go away on a little business trip to-morrow. Would you, as a special concession, feed those dogs for me in the morning?"

Charlotte smiled. "Certainly," she said, sweetly, "I should be only too glad. How about the chickens and the cow?"

"Oh, they are coming. I thought I'd get started with the dogs first."

"When do you expect them? I see the poultry papers are beginning to arrive."

"Yes; I am only waiting to pick up some of the best stock. As for the cow, I have got my eye on the finest cow that ever drew breath. I have been trying to get the owner to sell her to me."

Charlotte looked at him inquisitively. "Can you milk a cow?" she asked.

"Me milk a cow! Why, my dear girl, if I knew everything about a farm, there wouldn't be any fun in it. It's learning things that gives life its interest. I can't tell you how much good this is doing me. I come home at night tired and worn-out with business, and to feel that I have something that takes me outdoors is the grandest thing in the world!"

Von Blumer was now getting up at half-past six in the morning, and working until nearly eight o'clock at night.

"Are you as well as you were, dear?" said his wife, one day.

"Never felt better!"

"You look tired."

"It does me good. By the way, that cow

doesn't seem to be as chipper as she was when she came. I think we would better have the doctor."

"Are you going to have the same one you have for the dog? He has been here almost every day for two weeks. You must have a pretty big bill."

"Yes. Poor Bessie has had a hard time, but we expect to pull her through all right."

At this moment the bell rang and a letter was brought in from the postman. The postmark was Swantown. Von Blumer opened it curiously.

"Well, well," he said, "if this isn't from our old friend, Hen' Beebe!

" 'Mr. Von Blumer:

" 'Dear Sir—I heard you was getting prize winners. If you would like for me to send you Jerry, I think I should like to do it. Jerry ain't much use since you left. He's kind of old and feeble, but I thought as he done pretty well by you that you might like to have him again on your farm. I don't care to trade, but I'll take a reasonable sum.

" 'Yours truly,

" 'HEN' BEEBE.' "

There was a silence after Von Blumer had read the letter. Jerry's good offices of the past came up to them both simultaneously.

"He is such a dear old horse," said Charlotte. "I have often thought it seemed a shame to leave him behind. What good times we used to have with him! I think I shall pay a visit to mother next week, and what do you say to bringing Jerry back? You have your pets; why not let me have mine?"

"I am afraid he wouldn't add anything to my reputation as a gentleman-farmer; but still —I agree with you. By all means let's have him."

The next morning Charlotte took the first train for Swantown. She was gone for a week.

When her husband greeted her at the train on her arrival back, there was a quiet, subdued air about him that seemed in strange contrast to his manner for weeks.

"Is everything all right at home?" she asked.

"Oh, yes."

"How are the dogs and chickens? How is the cow?"

"Oh, I guess they are all right."

"I have brought Jerry. He is coming by freight."

"That's good."

They hurried home. As they drew near the house, Charlotte lifted her head to hear certain expected sounds.

"How silent everything is about the place!"

"Yes."

"Aren't the dogs well?"

"I hope so."

They entered. Charlotte swept her eye toward the rear of the house. No line of wire fence met her vision. The kennels that dotted the landscape were no more.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning," said Von Blumer, "is that I am no longer a dog-raiser. I am no longer a country gentleman. I have abandoned the whole thing."

"What for?"

"Simply because you had no proper sense of your duty as a wife! If you had, you would have helped me take care of those suffering animals. As it was, the burden was too much for me, and so, owing to your utter lack of what is right in a wife, I had to give it all up."

Charlotte's eyes glistened with joy.

"Don't misunderstand me, my dear," she said. "I love dogs—as much as I have seen of them. But, honestly now, wouldn't you rather have Jerry back with us than all the rest of the animal kingdom?"

"Yes," said Von Blumer, "I would. That is, if you promise to take care of him."

XV

IN WHICH IT IS CONCLUSIVELY DEMONSTRATED THAT TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING IS NOT GOOD FOR ANYBODY

IT seemed good to them, two days later, to be driving out once more behind old Jerry.

"He isn't very stylish," said Charlotte, doubtfully. "Indeed," she added, "I don't know what kind of an impression we are making in Tiverdale. I imagine the Dimpletons have an idea you are some sort of a sporting man, from your recent dog fever."

"Nonsense! Dimpleton knows me in a business way, doesn't he? Besides——"

He paused.

"Well, go on."

"I was only going to say that I met him this morning on the train, and he remarked on the fact that I no longer kept dogs."

"Yes; almost anyone in the neighborhood

would have noticed the silence. What did he say?"

Von Blumer smiled.

"I suppose I may as well tell you that he made a bet with another man—a fellow named Scoop. He bet Scoop I'd get rid of them in six weeks. Scoop bet I'd keep them two months."

"He won."

"Yes. I think it rather pleased him."

"Who is Scoop?"

"Some sort of a literary man. Gittup, Jerry."

They jogged along in silence.

"I suppose," said Charlotte, at last, reflectively, "we might dock Jerry's tail."

Her husband almost dropped the reins in his excitement.

"Never! Not if the whole population of Tiverdale ignores us forever. Do you know," he added, "that Jerry is a great help to me! I'm mighty glad to get him back. I get so I talk to him every day."

"Talk to him! I suppose he answers you back."

Charlotte was very practical. There were times when the poetical-imaginative streak in her husband positively irritated her.

"He does," replied Von Blumer, solemnly.

"How silly!"

"You may think so, but it isn't. He's a great help. We argue things out together in the stable. He knows! He knows!"

Charlotte tossed her head.

"Dear me! I wish, if that is the case, that you would kindly ask Jerry where to get a cook."

"What! Has Mary gone?"

"Yes. All on account of your dog fever. Really, my dear, I've exhausted all of my resources. I'm at my wit's end. Which reminds me that we must get back, as I shall have to prepare the dinner myself. It seems so hard to secure anybody who has even ordinary experience and ability."

Von Blumer, hitherto occupied with business to the exclusion of domestic affairs, had never taken much interest in the servant question. Now, however, his mind suddenly became active. Major Buddway was away, there was no golf, and now was his opportunity.

"I know it," he exclaimed. "I haven't had a decent meal, now, for I don't know when. Something has got to be done.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "I believe

there is something radically wrong about our methods. A matter that has a direct bearing on our happiness and is so important to all of us should be treated in a businesslike way. You can always get some one if you are willing to pay the price. Will you let me try?"

"All right," said Charlotte, rendered desperate; "by all means try if you wish. I certainly have got to the end of my rope."

"Very well. Expect a cook inside of forty-eight hours."

They drove back, and the next day Von Blumer made arrangements with his office to take a day or so off, and forthwith started out on his quest.

He did not, however, approach his task in the cut-and-dried spirit of the jaded housekeeper, worn out mentally and physically by a hopeless problem. He brought to it all the enthusiasm of his long business training.

After a day spent in looking over the field, he said:

"I have already arrived at a conclusion."

"But not a cook," said Charlotte, with a feeble attempt at satire.

"Don't be so hasty. Half the battle is to know the nature of the difficulties. In this instance

the trouble is apparent. The times are changing, and we are not willing to adjust ourselves to the new order. My dear, the reason you haven't been able to get a cook is because you haven't been willing to pay enough."

"But, good gracious! didn't we pay the last one twenty-two dollars a month, and no washing? Why, five years ago mama got them for eighteen dollars."

"But don't you see that in order to get one you must be willing to outbid others? Where there is a limited supply, it is simply a question of how much you are willing to pay. We must economize elsewhere, but a cook we *must* have at any price, and now that I understand the matter, I'll have one for you in a day."

"All right! If you want to pay the price you can. But I think it is an imposition to pay more than twenty-two dollars."

"Never you mind. Wait and see."

That evening he came home tired, but serene.

"Our troubles are over," he said, confidently. "Our cook is coming to-morrow."

"Where did you get her? How much——"

"Never you mind. Don't you ask me a question. Only remember this—she understands her business thoroughly. She bears exactly the

same relation to the kitchen that an expert accountant does to a set of books—if you can appreciate the allusion. Keep out of her way, supply her with what she wants, let me pay the bills, and be happy for once in your life."

The next morning the new cook came on schedule time. She was a calm, self-contained person, with a perfect mastery of her art. The moment she stepped into the house her touch was felt.

That evening Von Blumer faced his wife at dinner with a happy smile.

"Well, my dear, how is it? How do you like her?"

Charlotte beamed.

"I must say that she does know how to cook. Why, dear, she has taken entire charge. She knows everything. Hot breads, cakes, pies, pastry of all kinds, fancy dishes—everything. Why, she knows as much as any hotel chef."

"Isn't it grand to have a woman like that!"

"It certainly is nice."

For dinner they had a cream soup, soft-shell crabs, steaks and mushrooms with potatoes à la Parisienne, macaroni au gratin, a delicious salad, snow pudding with home-made macaroons and coffee.

"This is something like," said Von Blumer, as he settled back for a peaceful smoke.

The next morning they had fruit, stewed kidneys, hot biscuits, waffles and cinnamon, and coffee.

"Grand!" exclaimed Von Blumer.

That evening for dinner they had asparagus soup, timbales of sole, chicken croquettes, with four fancy vegetables, salad, strawberry shortcake and coffee.

At the end of the fifth day Von Blumer said:

"Dear, did you ever take any more solid comfort in your life?"

"Never! How much——"

"Never you mind! Neither did I. It's worth it. But I'm going to make a suggestion. I think we might cut down on the breakfast a little. The truth is, I'm eating too much. Tell her not to have hot bread more than every other day."

"But, my dear, if I did that, she might not like it. You know, a fine cook doesn't like to be interfered with."

"Well, can't you throw out a hint?"

"Why don't you?"

"No! I haven't your tact."

"Nonsense!"

"Let's wait."

Waiting, however, did not better the situation.

"I thought," said Von Blumer, twenty-four hours later, "the first day or so she was showing off, and that she really hadn't gotten her hand in. It seems to me these meals of ours get more elaborate all the time."

He toyed aimlessly with a patty.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

Charlotte was looking a trifle pale.

"Well, if you really must know, I feel as if I never wanted another thing to eat in my life."

"I feel the same. We can't keep this up, can we?"

"I don't see how we can. The worst of it is that we can't stop her. She's a professional cook. She loves it. It's an art with her, and when she turns out something particularly rich and indigestible and we don't eat it, she feels—well, imagine how an artist feels whose masterpiece is unappreciated."

"But we can't go on this way. I shall die if we do. I can gradually feel myself getting a hopeless and incurable case of dyspepsia."

"So can I."

The next day Von Blumer did not come home to dinner. At nine o'clock he entered softly. Charlotte was lying on the sofa, with a glass of hot soda and a box of pepsin tablets by her side.

"What kept you?" she demanded fretfully.

"Darling, forgive me, but I couldn't help it. You know my health is important. I stayed downtown and got a cup of tea and some dry toast."

"You cruel, heartless thing! And left me to stay home and eat that dinner! Oh!"

Mrs. Von Blumer groaned.

"How I am suffering! Purée of Jackson soup, chicken livers en brochette, pigeon pie, cucumber salad, ice cream. Oh, oh!"

"Forgive me, dearest! Next time you shall take tea with me."

Charlotte rose up with what remaining strength she had.

"I've stood it as long as I can! Anything is better than this. Life for me now is one long gastronomical horror. Get rid of her, can't you? You hired her."

"But what shall I say? She is no ordinary woman. I can't insult her. Think of the contempt she would have for me if I should declare

we weren't used to such things. Besides, what are we going to do? We must have some one. And you admit you never had to do a single thing since she came."

"No," muttered Charlotte. "I haven't—nothing but eat and suffer. You!" she cried, "you have some relief. You can get your luncheons downtown. But for me, I cannot get away. And I can't resist, either. Besides, our expenses have doubled, to say nothing of what you pay her. Look at these bills!"

Von Blumer snatched up the bundle she gave him, and looked them over. He turned deathly pale.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Why, we'll be bankrupt. And I'm paying her forty dollars a month into the bargain."

"Horrible!"

"Never mind. You go to bed, send for the doctor and leave the rest to me."

The next morning he came up to her bedside with a cup of tea and some half-burnt toast. Charlotte had overslept herself.

"What does this mean?"

"It means that at last we are alone. I prepared this for you myself."

"How did you get rid of her?"

"I told her we were leaving for Europe on to-morrow morning's steamer, by special invitation of King Edward, and gave her her month's pay in advance."

"Thank God!"

Von Blumer kissed his wife's pale face.

"Yes," he said, "thank God! And now, my dear, we'll camp out by ourselves for a few weeks until health and strength come back to both of us."

XVI

IN WHICH MAJOR BUDDWAY'S ABSENCE BRINGS ON A CRISIS—THE MAJOR ARRIVES IN THE NICK OF TIME

IT has doubtless been perceived that there was about Major Buddway's advice a negative quality, which, under some circumstances and with some men, might not have been useful. But Major Buddway was almost as necessary to Von Blumer as Charlotte. Every man needs one friend. In the Major, Von Blumer found a vast repository of masculine sympathy. That gentleman's astounding vitality, in which his very weaknesses seemed to be hopelessly submerged, stood as a bulwark for Von Blumer's outbursts. This was why Charlotte, aside from her own personal love for the Major, encouraged him to visit them as often as possible, and why, when the Major was away, she always looked for trouble.

Unfortunately, this time a combination of circumstances was against her. For not only was the Major's absence prolonged, but the change to a country life had stimulated her husband to all sorts of activities, which with his business to occupy him, the Major to vent his feelings upon, and social affairs to fill in the gaps, would ordinarily have made it impossible for him to enter into any new fields.

It was not long after their gastronomical experiment, however, before there were signs of something new.

One afternoon Von Blumer came home with a hypnotized look about him, and said, softly:

"This is the greatest day of my life!"

Charlotte's face assumed a look of anxiety.

"I hope, dear," she said, "that you are not going to start anything new. You know, you are so easily influenced that——"

Von Blumer smiled a scornful smile.

"Me easily influenced! I like that. Hum! Ha! That's highly amusing. Well, my dear, I forgive you. That's like a woman. It being your one particular weak point, you like to put it off onto me. Easily influenced! Ha!"

His suspicious wife was in too much suspense as to his latest idea to be led aside by his

superior manner. She had suffered too much already from his passion for something new not to be alarmed.

"I hope," she said, "that it isn't any new system of work. You're not going to take up photography, are you? There's really no place for a dark-room. You haven't invited a lot of business friends to dinner, have you? Because——"

He stopped her with a gesture.

"My dear, it's really pitiful to see your condition. No tone—no resilience to you—tired and nervous. You need——"

He stopped. Experience had taught him to be chary of introducing any new idea too suddenly.

He looked at her fixedly.

"I want to ask you a question," he said.

"Well, well, what is it?"

"Do you love me?"

"Don't be absurd."

"I say—do you love me?"

"I suppose so."

"Do you value my companionship? Do you realize that upon me depend the support and well-being of this entire household? Think of what it means! Ah, think of the responsibil-

ity I'm under. If this hasn't come home to you yet, I assure you it has to me. It devolves upon me, therefore, as a positive duty, to see that I am always in the best possible physical condition. My eye must be bright, my step springy, my muscles velvety and yet hard and firm. I——"

Charlotte remembered with trepidation that for several days past her husband had been absorbed in reading certain circulars that had come to him.

"You don't mean to say," she faltered, "that you have gone into Health?"

"I most certainly have. I have done what I should have done five years ago. Still, it is not too late. Even for a man of my age, the chances of increasing my chest at least five inches in six months are almost certain. Professor Bounder——"

Charlotte's worst fears were confirmed. She remembered seeing, in a kind of upholstered undress, this magnificent gentleman pictured in the pages of certain periodicals that Von Blumer had been collecting.

"Has—he—any apparatus?" she inquired, faintly.

"Well—I should say he has. 'A' life-saver

for every man, woman and child in this nerve-racking age."

"How big is it?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing. Takes up only six feet of floor space."

"Where do you intend putting it? You can't——"

"Now don't get uneasy. I've got the whole thing arranged. There's a wide, open space in the attic, right near the window. There, my dear girl, is where I shall gradually bring myself back to life and strength."

That afternoon, at three o'clock, a huge packing-box was delivered by a drayman. A few moments after Von Blumer appeared, armed with a hammer. The sides were torn off, and by herculean efforts the two men lifted the affair upstairs, while Charlotte, tears in her eyes, looked silently on.

The drayman departed. There was a sound of hammering and tugging and scraping. Then a brief silence.

Charlotte was getting uneasy. Suddenly, however, the door opened. Her husband, clad only in last year's bathing suit, with a pair of gymnasium sandals on his feet, stood dramatically before her. His face was trans-

fused with joy. He threw out his chest and folded his arms calmly, like a Greek gladiator—only, his legs being somewhat thinner than those old heroes', were possibly not quite so nourishing to view.

"Now, my dear girl, I want to show you the greatest apparatus ever devised by the mind of man for the health. Every muscle reached, external or internal. The vital organs gently stimulated. Come."

He led the way upstairs into the attic.

"There," he exclaimed, triumphantly, "what do you think of that? Wait till I show you how it works."

He sprang into what was more like an ordinary rowing-machine than anything else. He grasped the handles. He slid gracefully back and forth, stretching out his arms before him. Then he stood up, and, bending down, pulled some lever that controlled two weights at the side.

"In this simple, marvelous piece of mechanism," he remarked, gasping for breath, "lies the secret of human life."

He grabbed his wife by her arm and pulled her towards him.

"Are you aware," he muttered, "that every

He threw out his chest and folded his arms calmly.

muscle is like a sponge—that if it isn't squeezed out regularly, impurities collect? Think of it!"

"You'll catch your death of cold with that window open."

"Ha! That only shows your ignorance. You see my body is in a warm glow. The rich ozone in the air only serves to purify the skin."

"How often are you going to do this thing?"

"You'd be surprised how little of it is necessary. I rise promptly at six."

"At six?"

"That's what I said. Half an hour before breakfast, then a brisk rub-down, and in the afternoon, half an hour before dinner. That's all. Think of it—a mere nothing!"

The next morning, while it was yet dark, Charlotte was awakened from her slumber by an ominous sound overhead. She started up. Her first thought was burglars. Then she recalled her husband.

"This is awful!" she murmured. "No sleep for me."

For some time she turned and tossed. At last, unable to stand it any longer, she put on her bath-robe and started upstairs. Von

Blumer almost bounded into her as he came down.

"Look here, dear, that is too much. I simply can't stand it to be waked up every morning by that horrible thing."

"I knew it! Just like a woman! Here I am making a sacrifice of myself in order to preserve my health, for your sake, for your sake, I say—heaven knows I care nothing for myself—and now you make the usual fuss about it. But thank heaven, Charlotte, I have a better regard for myself, a higher sense of duty than to be influenced by what you may say. And now stand aside. I must rub myself down with a coarse towel."

With the calmness of despair, Charlotte saw there was nothing to do but wait for developments.

That afternoon at five her husband appeared upon the scene, and in a few moments a distant rumbling indicated that he and the product of Dr. Bounder's wonderful brain were in close communion.

At dinner, however, he toyed with his food. She noticed that he had rings under his eyes.

"Aren't you well, dear?" she asked.

Von Blumer jumped as if he had been shot.

"Well!" he ejaculated. "Well! I should say I was. It's grand to feel this way. Simply wonderful."

"You are not hungry."

"Umph! That's the beauty about Bounder's machine. It develops a natural health appetite. Most of us overeat."

The next morning Charlotte was awakened as usual by the grinding overhead. This time, however, she kept quiet. Somehow it seemed to her that it did not last so long as the morning before. And in the afternoon she also noticed that her husband was ten minutes later in getting home.

Four days passed. One morning she awoke with a dim consciousness that something was wrong. Instead of a noise overhead she heard in the adjoining room a peaceful snore. Her tired husband had overslept himself. At the breakfast-table he appeared a little later than usual. There was a suggestion of sheepishness about him.

He himself led the way.

"I suppose," he said, "that just because I didn't go through that stunt this morning you think I'm a backslider?"

"Well, I was so relieved not to hear the

noise that I didn't much care what you were. I hope, dear, you will give it up. I don't believe it will do you a bit of good."

"That's all you know about it. However, for your information, I will tell you that I am going to give it up. I've found something better."

Charlotte shuddered.

"What is it?" she asked timidly.

"Bounder is all right in his way. For certain people, I have no doubt he accomplishes grand results. You may not know it, you may not fully realize the fact, but even in the short time I used his machine my chest came up one inch and a half. Think of it! But the trouble with Bounder is that he is too strenuous. Now, Humpton is more scientific. Humpton——"

"Who is Humpton?"

Von Blumer gazed at his wife in ill-concealed scorn.

"Do you mean to say," he said sternly, "that you've never heard of the celebrated Humpton system? It's done by correspondence through the mail. I started in this morning. You won't know me in a week."

"What do you do? Is it anything that makes a noise?"

"I should say not. No apparatus. Nothing but a rubber ball."

"A rubber ball? Why not a baby's rattle? You can get lots of exercise out of that, and it has a pleasant jingle."

Von Blumer's eye flashed fire.

"Of course, no woman could possibly understand a thing like this. Of course, all my honest, high-minded efforts to keep myself in the pink of condition—all for your sake, mind you—must be received with derision. Never mind, my dear; I shall go on my way regardless. Other great men have been laughed at before. I can stand it."

Charlotte by this time realized that the situation was becoming serious. She feared almost for her husband's life. That afternoon she despatched a message to Major Buddway, urging him to return at once, if possible.

The next morning she was awakened once more—this time by a series of hoarse breathings. Her husband, a large rubber ball between his shoulder-blades, was pressing it into the wall, as he snorted with a certain attempt at rhythmic vigor, his eyes nearly popping out of his head.

"Stop!" exclaimed Charlotte. "You will

strain yourself, I know. Can't you feel the wind blowing on you?"

Her husband stepped forward, and the rubber ball, released, bounded across the room. He stooped over, and, taking it in his hands, began to manipulate it with his fingers.

"Don't interrupt me," he muttered. "I must keep my thoughts on myself. That's a part of the system."

Several days passed—days through which Mrs. Von Blumer lived with considerable anxiety. Her husband—it could not be denied—was getting more feeble. There was about him an affectation of sprightliness that did not conceal his listlessness.

One morning, however, hope sprang up in her breast as she awakened to hear once again the old familiar snore. The crisis, then, was passed. Von Blumer was himself again. She almost regretted that she had sent for the Major.

At the breakfast-table she said, pleasantly:

"How's Humpton—and the new system?"

Von Blumer did not immediately reply. He was evidently gathering himself together for a supreme effort.

"What hurts me," he said, with an air of

deep resignation, "is the utter inability of your feeble mind to grasp what I am trying to do. Here we are, to quote from a circular I received yesterday—'victims of the stress and strain of modern competition, where the way about us is strewn with physical wrecks, and with none of us paying the slightest attention to our physical bodies——' "

"Well, I can't complain of you on that score. You are certainly not neglecting yours."

"I say," went on Von Blumer, haughtily ignoring her remark, "that 'victims of the stress and'—where was I? Oh, yes—'and our strength sapped by the exacting requirements of modern business life—we, as a race, are gradually growing weaker and weaker.' Now what am I doing? I am trying to save myself from such an awful fate. I trust, my dear, that I still cherish a few ideals. I trust I have a lofty conception of my duty, and when, in an honest and painstaking effort to find the truth, I am obliged to enter upon a few mild experiments, what do I meet with from the one person who should stand by me with her earnest sympathy and encouragement? Nothing, absolutely nothing but ridicule. It is too much!"

Charlotte was really touched.

"Don't think I don't appreciate it," she said, earnestly. "Forgive me, darling. I didn't mean to offend you. Has Humpton also failed you? Speak freely. It shall be in the strictest confidence."

Mrs. Von Blumer, it will be observed, was one woman in a thousand. She knew when she was really needed.

"Humpton," explained Von Blumer, "and Bounder, I am convinced, are doing what they can for humanity. No doubt their systems are admirable for some people. As for me——"

He lowered his voice.

"Well, the fact is, they don't quite work. I am satisfied they are not the thing for my constitution. But, my dear, it is only by constant experiment that we can arrive at the truth. I do not despair. The ideal man is before me. I shall probe this matter to the very bottom. I'm going into it deep. The voice of duty rings clear within me. Have patience! I shall yet discover the secret of a buoyant vitality."

By this time Charlotte was in hopes that her husband had had enough. But she realized now that she must see him through to the bitter end.

In the meantime, she received word that the Major was coming.

Days passed. The mail was ominous with literature. Von Blumer came and went with a preoccupied air. Gradually, however, his face changed; light shone in his ever-hopeful eye; his step grew elastic. A new era apparently was beginning to dawn.

One morning he took his wife aside. He drew her gently toward him on the sofa. He gazed calmly, radiantly, triumphantly, into her questioning face.

"Darling," he murmured, "I've got it."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. A new life has opened up for us both! Vistas of immense power stretch onward. Henceforth, existence for us is an earthly paradise."

"Out with it, dear. I cannot wait."

In reply, he drew from his pocket a small pamphlet, as he said, solemnly:

"All is mind."

Mrs. Von Blumer started back.

"You don't mean to tell me," she cried, "that you have become a Christian Scientist?"

"Now, that's just like a woman—to jump at conclusions. Well, I should say not. The

Christian Scientists no doubt are groping after the truth. They have gathered up a few fragments of it. But they are as nothing compared with what has been revealed to me. Yes, my dear, within this precious little volume you see here lies the secret of life's utmost freedom. All is thought. We ourselves create our own environment. To-day we think what to-morrow we are. All we have to do is to place ourselves *en rapport* with the mystic harmony of the universe. Rhythmic breathing, an utter lack of fear—a sort of welcoming, as it were, of every consequence, a constant passiveness to all the vibrations that are flowing through us—in fact, to be nearly as possible like a jelly-fish."

"A jelly-fish!"

"Yes. You see this humble animal typifies in reality the freedom of life. He ebbs and flows with the current. By utterly relaxing myself, by making myself feel like a jelly-fish, well, say two or three times a day, in a short time I shall begin to gather power, which will increase all the time. It's all mind, you understand. Everything unpleasant is unreal—false. And now, I must go into the Silence."

Von Blumer led the way upstairs, followed by his awe-struck partner. He placed himself

gently and harmoniously on the bed, at full length. Then he began to breathe slowly.

"Observe my chest," he whispered, "how it rises and falls in tune with the rhythmic vibrations of the spheres. I shall now will away all harmful thoughts. I shall demand power. Ah! Already I can feel myself getting into the grandeur of it. Leave me!"

His stricken wife left him. She went into her own room, locked the door, and said her prayers in the good old-fashioned way. She prayed that her husband might be spared.

For days thereafter his face, bright and smiling, haunted her. Nothing disturbed him. Hour by hour he grew more angelic.

A week passed. One afternoon, however, he came home earlier than usual. As he entered the room his wife fancied she detected upon his face a slight flush. Her observation was confirmed when he spoke.

"You've caught cold."

"Me! Caught cold!" replied Von Blumer, hoarsely. "Oh, no, darling!"

"But you have—you're as hoarse as a frog."

"Merely a thought."

She passed her hand over his forehead.

"You have a fever."

"A fever! What is that? I don't know it—it is not in my vocabulary."

"How do you feel?"

"Grand!"

"Now, you can't fool me," said Charlotte, thoroughly alarmed. "How does your head feel?"

"There was a time when it might have ached. Now—a mere sensation!"

Dinner was announced.

"You have no appetite," said Charlotte, looking him over critically.

"It does not matter. Eating is of no consequence—a thought. Leave me; I must take a treatment."

His wife reluctantly left him.

When she came back, thirty minutes later, however, instead of lying down fully dressed and going into the "Silence," he had retired. His feverish face looked out at her from the pillow, over the collar of his pajama. He was still smiling, but it was like violets in January—a trifle forced.

"How do you feel?"

"Fine!"

Mrs. Von Blumer had reached her limit. Even to a good woman and a loving wife there

is a limit of endurance. She threw aside her patience. Her husband was a sick man. This was no time to parley. She was mad clear through.

She advanced to the bedside. Her voice changed.

"Look here! Henry Von Blumer, you tell me the truth, and no foolishness. *How do you feel?*"

There was a ring in her voice that in an instant went down into the depths of Von Blumer's consciousness and brought him back to her once again.

He raised himself up in bed.

"Feel!" he exclaimed. "Do you really want to know how I feel? I'll tell you. I know what's the matter with me. I've got a good old-fashioned case of genuine grip. Every bone in my body aches. My head is full of railroad iron. I'm hotter than the devil. Do anything you please with me. Cover me with mustard plasters. Fill me with tablets. Soak my feet and my head if you want to—in hot water. Feel! Why, I feel so utterly and hopelessly miserable that I don't even care how much of a consummate ass I've made of myself—oh, dear, if the Major were only here!"

At this moment, as if to answer his prayer, the bell rang. the door below opened, there was a stately step on the stair, accompanied by a prolonged puffing.

"May I come up?" said a well-known voice.

"Yes, yes," said Charlotte, delightedly, grasping him by the hand. "Come right in."

"What's the matter with you, Henry?" asked the Major.

"The matter," said Von Blumer, feebly, "is that I've been making an ass of myself. Charlotte will tell you all about it."

He leaned forward in bed.

"Tell me, Major," he said, "how do you manage it? How do you keep so well?"

Major Buddway smiled a cherubic smile.

"My boy," he said, "don't despair. I'll take you in hand and you'll be all right in a few days. How do I manage it? Why, it's the easiest thing in the world."

He lowered his voice and leaned confidentially over his already revivified friend, and whispered:

"I keep away from the doctors, take as little exercise as possible, eat what I please, sleep when I please, never worry about anything, and do as I damned please!"

XVII

IN WHICH THE VON BLUMERS ARE INVITED TO A DINNER PARTY, AND CHARLOTTE ANNOUNCES A CERTAIN DECISION

THE Von Blumers had now been living in Tiverdale long enough to have all the people call upon them whom they didn't want to know. They were beginning to notice friendly signals from that more select circle of people whom they felt that it was desirable for them to know.

It was high time that this happy result should take place, for certain novelties in their own home were beginning to pall upon them, and their own companionship was becoming somewhat irksome. The dog fever had passed its crisis, the health fad had gone its way, and convalescence and recovery had succeeded. That period of inviting all their city friends out to

see them, and finding themselves on Monday morning hopeless physical wrecks, had also passed its meridian.

It is true that Major Buddway never failed to cheer; it is true that Charlotte's mother—wise enough never to stay too long—was a periodical source of comfort, and it was also true that Jerry, now a settled companion, furnished much solace. It seemed impossible, as they renewed their rides behind this interesting and lovable animal, not to renew also some of those ecstatic moments of courtship which had preceded their marriage. Jerry had about him an atmosphere of love. An invisible Cupid seemed to be perched upon his aged back, and Von Blumer found himself time and again, as they wound slowly in and out along the country roads about Tiverdale, pressing his wife's hand in token that all was still well between them and that the harmonies of matrimony were yet undisturbed by the flight of time.

Human companionship, however, is at all times desirable, when properly administered, and when it is possible for one to regulate the doses. Neighbors are good to indulge in, to borrow from, and to gossip about. Good neighbors are more to be desired than much

fine silver, and often the means of providing it in the case of gastronomic emergency. The Von Blumers had not yet arrived at this felicitous period; but judging from the friendly attitude of certain of their peers, it seemed to be not far distant.

The Dimpletons lived two doors away. They obtruded themselves only so far as was necessary to promote the greatest combined happiness, and they had that proper admixture of dependence and independence which is the *summum bonum* of suburban existence among neighbors.

Mrs. Dimpleton called after the Von Blumers had been living in Tiverdale for six months. She did not apologize for the delay. She did not say that she had been so busy that she could not walk across the lawn to visit her new neighbors. But when she did come, Mrs. Von Blumer mentally made up her mind that it was worth waiting six months for.

Von Blumer met Dimpleton at odd times, and it was not long before the two men came to be on a firm footing with each other, exchanging little suburban masculine confidences with that freedom which makes for the longevity of friendship.

One evening Von Blumer, coming home, was greeted by his wife with a tender smile.

"I have some news for you. We have been invited to dine at the Dimpletons'."

"When?"

"Next Thursday evening. Quite an informal dinner, Mrs. Dimpleton said."

"I suppose that means that we put on the best that we have, and are bored to death all the evening. I have been to informal dinners before."

"Nonsense! When the Dimpletons say it is informal they mean it. Besides, you know they are both quite democratic, and I am looking forward to a very pleasant evening."

"Is any one else to be there?"

"She spoke of Mrs. Willoby and her daughter."

"Who are they?"

"Is it possible that you do not know of Mrs. Willoby? She is the president of the Woman's Club; the most intelligent woman in the State. They say she knows everything!"

"I wonder," said Von Blumer, "whether she can open oysters?"

"What an incongruous remark!"

"Isn't it? I don't know why it occurred to

me, except that the thought of an intelligent woman always suggests poor food, and this, coupled with the fact that people who give dinners nowadays never have good oysters, is, perhaps, what led me to the observation. I suspect already that the Dimpletons' oysters are going to be poor. Never mind—tell me more about this intelligent president of the Woman's Club. Is she a widow?"

"She is."

"She probably wore her husband out with her intelligence. I hope that I shall not have to sit next to her. Personally, I prefer Mrs. Dimpleton."

"You seem," said Charlotte, "to have taken a violent prejudice against Mrs. Willoby. Don't you know that all the women in Tiverdale are at her beck and call? Don't you know that she practically directs the thought of the community? I wish you could see the programme that she got up for the Woman's Club, which, by the way, they have asked me to join."

"It's really wonderful!"

"Now, my dear, I beg that you will restrain your satire. She is a very admirable person."

"You spoke of her daughter," said Von Blumer. "Is she as intelligent as her mother?"

"Oh, dear, no! She is a nice, simple, sweet, pretty little girl of twenty."

"That is my kind. Probably takes after her father. I hope that I may sit between her and Mrs. Dimpleton, and as far away from the president of the Woman's Club as possible."

It was useless for Von Blumer to conceal his feelings wherever an abnormally intelligent woman was mentioned.

"Never mind," said Charlotte. "Don't forget to come home early on Thursday."

The dinner was at seven. At six Von Blumer appeared on the scene. He found his wife upstairs, with a distressed air.

"I'm so glad you have come," she said. "You know, I can't make up my mind what to wear. She said it was to be an informal dinner, and *did* she mean it? I want to make a good impression on Mrs. Willoby; but if I wear evening dress, all the rest of the women may have on high-necked gowns. What shall I do?"

Her husband leaned back and smiled a broad, unsympathetic smile.

"As if it made the slightest difference," he said. "You amuse me greatly. Who cares? Go as you please, wear what you want to. Be yourself. If you have a low-neck gown that

suits you, and you feel more comfortable in it than anything else, for heaven's sake wear it! That's the trouble with a woman—always afraid to do something that other people may criticise. Now, my dear, get a good start and begin. We only have an hour, and it will take you fifty-five minutes to arrange your hair."

Seeing that there was no help from him, Charlotte quietly retired within her own room, and for thirty minutes there was that ominous feminine silence that always precedes a social function.

Suddenly, however, she was startled by a loud knock at the door. Her husband did not wait for her reply, but burst into the room. His hair was tousled. He was in complete disarray.

"Look here! What am I going to wear to-night?"

She gazed at him from the serene heights of a calm superiority.

"Wear?" she said. "What do you mean?"

"Am I to wear a plain dinner-coat or full evening dress? What do they do in these suburban places, anyhow? I wouldn't make a mistake for anything."

Charlotte smiled.

"Wear?" she said. "The idea of asking such a question! Wear anything. What difference does it make? That is just like you men—always fussing about your personal appearance—always afraid that you'll disturb some convention. Who cares what you wear?"

By this time Von Blumer, whose self-possession in certain emergencies did not equal that of his wife, was beside himself.

"All right for you!" he said. "That is just what I might expect. When I really need your help you are never ready to give it. Here's a matter that our whole future life in this community depends upon, and you calmly dismiss it as if it were of no consequence. Never mind. I'll find out. I'll telephone to Dimpleton!"

His terrified wife sprang up.

"Don't do it! Don't you know any better than that? That would be simply awful! It's better to make a mistake than to do that."

"Well, what am I to do, then? You won't let me find out, and you won't tell me what to wear. If I put on full-dress the rest of them will probably have on outing suits, and they will set me down for a snob."

While he had been talking, his wife had been calmly proceeding with her toilet. As she put

he finishing touches to her hair, she said, weetly:

"I tell you what you do, my dear; choose he lesser of two evils. Wear your evening clothes. One never feels half so uncomfortable with what is correct as one does not to be dressed correctly when others are."

"You are right. That is a splendid idea. I will be with you in a few minutes."

Fifteen minutes passed. It was dangerously near the moment when they were to go.

"Are you ready?" said Charlotte.

"In a minute."

"Are you ready?" repeated Charlotte, in another minute.

Her husband dashed out of his room, brushing himself off with his whisk-broom in one hand and looking at his watch with the other.

"Do you realize," he cried, "that we have not an instant to spare?"

"Perfectly."

"And do you know the reason why?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"The reason why," he continued, "is because you kept me all this time discussing what to wear. Next time I shall know better and not

ask for your advice. Come on!" and he bundled her out of the house precipitately.

At midnight they were back again. They stole into the house under cover of the darkness, Mrs. Von Blumer removing her wrap in the hall, her husband depositing his silk hat on top of it, and then, by mutual consent they filed into the drawing-room and sat down and looked at each other. There was no sleep for them that night until that dinner had been discussed.

"Pretty nice affair," said Von Blumer, as an opening remark.

Charlotte looked at him with a mingling of surprise and tolerance.

"Did you really think so?"

"Yes. Very nice. Awf'ly jolly and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Did you notice that centre-piece?"

"Centre-piece? No, I didn't know they had one."

"I don't see how you could help but notice it. It was the only thing I saw for the first fifteen minutes. It wasn't ironed properly. Mrs. Dimpleton ought to get a new laundress. And then, my dear, she served butter with the dinner!"

"Well, what in the world is a dinner without butter?"

Charlotte gazed at him with more surprise and less tolerance.

"Did you ever see a smart dinner at which butter was served?"

"I don't care a hang whether it was smart or not. I like butter always at dinner, and I think it a blamed poor dinner that doesn't have butter with it."

"Did you notice," said Mrs. Von Blumer, ignoring his outburst, "that there were no serving plates?"

"What of it? They are useless, anyhow."

Charlotte sank back in a hopeless manner.

"And the bread," she murmured; "it was cut thin. Always thick for dinner, you know. I must say, that I do like Mrs. Dimpleton, and, too, I think she is an awfully nice woman; but if I couldn't give a better dinner than that——"

Von Blumer got up.

"Now, look here," he said. "You are gossiping about your neighbors, and that is a thing I can't permit. Only—just as I said, the oysters were frightful! Why is it that no self-respecting woman can have decent oysters when she gives a dinner-party? I don't know what the

process is. Apparently she goes to the fish man the week before. He orders the oysters sent by freight. When they arrive, the day before or the morning of the dinner, it doesn't make much difference which, they are opened and put into a slow oven. After every particle of the natural juice of the oyster has been carefully dried out they are put on a tin tray and into the delivery wagon, where they traverse the town during the day. About three hours before the dinner they are delivered, and when it's too late to save them they are packed in ice and served to the long-suffering guests."

Having delivered himself of this criticism, Von Blumer relapsed into silence.

"Of course," continued Charlotte, in a semi-soliloquy, "it was an informal dinner—there can be no doubt about that. But it pleases me to think that there wasn't anything there that I couldn't have done better myself."

"Did you have a good time?"

"Very nice, indeed."

"Then, what's the matter with you? Isn't that the object of a dinner? Or is the object of a dinner to make everybody feel uncomfortable, just because you are filling them all the evening with the consciousness that they can't

do so well? Is that your idea of a good time?"

"No, no, certainly not. But it's a comfort to feel that I know as much, if not more, about how to give a dinner as anybody in Tiverdale —because Mrs. Dimpleton is certainly one of the leading women here. What did you think of Mrs. Willoby?"

"Mrs. Willoby," said Von Blumer, "is altogether too clever for me. She fairly bristles with knowledge. It must be a frightful thing to have to live with a woman like that. I can imagine her husband, now that he is dead and gone, congratulating himself every moment of his precious immortality."

"She seems to irritate you strangely."

"She irritates me," replied Von Blumer, "because in one sense she is really a sham. Mrs. Dimpleton, who doesn't pretend to know one-tenth as much as she does, and puts on no frills, is infinitely her superior. Even her own daughter is her superior."

"But you don't know Mrs. Willoby's accomplishments. Her culinary class has been a tremendous success. They say she is an expert in domestic science."

"There is only one thing I hope and long

for," replied Von Blumer, "and that is, that she may meet Major Buddway. Nothing would please me more than to have those two come together."

"That suggests an idea. I believe the Major would fall in love with her," said Charlotte, her match-making instincts rising swiftly to the surface.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am going to give a dinner. I mean I am going to show Mrs. Dimpleton a thing or two. We will ask Mrs. Willoby and her daughter and the Major. I am so glad I have got a competent waitress. I only hope she'll stay. And now let's get some sleep."

From the next morning, preparations for the dinner of retaliation went on swiftly. It was arranged that Charlotte should return the compliment as soon as the proper combination of servants made such a venture entirely safe.

In the meantime an event occurred which, for the time being, drove all thoughts of dinners out of their minds.

The residents of Tiverdale were gradually becoming addicted to the use of automobiles.

Dimpleton had gone in for one on a small

scale. Scoop, the literary man, puffed about in a huge affair in red.

"The thing to do," said Dimpleton, as they sat and smoked after his dinner, "is to get a second-hand machine first. Then, when you've learned the game, go in for something handsome."

Thus the fatal seed of desire was implanted in Von Blumer's soul.

"Jerry, old man," he said to the old horse that night in the stable, "don't think I'm going back on you, but—you may soon have a roommate—if I can strike the right thing."

XVIII

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE VALUE OF A THING IS JUST AS MUCH AS IT WILL BRING

IT was only a few days afterwards that, coming home from business late one afternoon, Von Blumer greeted Charlotte with an unusual warmth.

"Wait till you see what I've got."

Having delivered himself of this enthusiasm he started to say more; but, perceiving on his wife's face a look of anxiety, he said, rapidly beginning to hedge:

"Don't be alarmed. You'll be as glad as I am when you hear about it; only you must know the whole truth, so that you won't be prejudiced. You know Paynor's place, of course?"

"Never heard of it."

"What!" exclaimed Von Blumer. "Never heard of Paynor's? Well, for your informa-

:ion, my dear, I will say that it is the finest and best automobile exchange in this country. To-day I strolled in there to look around and——"

"You didn't get anything?"

"Didn't I, though! Ha! The chance of a lifetime! You may not believe it, my dear, but I picked up a five-thousand-dollar machine for eight hundred dollars. Think of it—only been run a few months; good as new! Ouvrier, who, by the way, is one of our leading millionaires, sold it because he really had more on hand than he cared for."

"I feel sure you got cheated!"

"Cheated! Me—cheated! That's all you know about it. In the first place, it was a rainy day and few buyers. I just picked up a bargain, that's all. A chance like that might never come again. Why, the tires alone—brand new, of course—are worth in the open market four hundred or five hundred dollars. Wait till you see her! Newly painted—a really wonderful machine. And she'll just fit into the stable. Jerry won't mind. I've asked him."

"Did you go out in her?" quavered Charlotte.

"It wasn't necessary. They started her up—went right off at the very first turn—and she

ran like a bird, right on the floor of the garage. Wonderful horse-power. I've forgotten how much it is."

His wife sighed deeply.

"I don't want to make you angry, dear," she said, "but I really didn't suppose you were such a fool."

"Why?"

"Well, you know, those men are doing that sort of thing right along. They are not losing money, and you are the victim. You might at least have given it a fair trial."

Von Blumer smiled.

"Now, my dear, don't think I'm so bad as that. Of course, I understand fully that I was running some risk. But the circumstances were peculiar, and to buy for only eight hundred dollars a machine that I knew positively was sold for five thousand dollars, in the condition that it appears to be in, is not going to involve me in much of a loss. I may, of course, have to have something done to it that I cannot tell about now. But even so, that isn't going to be very terrible. And if I find I'm stuck, why, I certainly can get rid of it again at that small figure."

"Perhaps you can. Let us hope so."

But in spite of her resigned manner, Charlotte's heart misgave her.

The next day the wonderful machine, glistening in a new coat of red paint, came home, and as it stood proudly out in the backyard, it was, indeed, as Von Blumer remarked enthusiastically to his wife, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

"You'd better try it first," said Charlotte, "and then if it works all right, I'll go out with you."

Von Blumer had been out in automobiles with Dimpleton enough to know how to run one.

He had equipped himself with goggles, cap and coat, and as he started off he presented a truly picturesque and mechanical appearance.

The hours passed.

At three Mrs. Von Blumer was nervous.

At four she was uneasy.

At five she was in a panic.

At five-thirty the telephone rang.

"This you, my dear?"

"Yes—I've been so worried——"

"Don't mention it. I'm at the machinist's. Mr. Trundle is looking her over for me."

"What does he think?"

"I fear the worst. But I'm coming right up and I'll tell you."

In another hour Von Blumer appeared, walking.

He waved his hand bravely to his wife.

"Well, dear, how is it?"

"Pretty bad. I'm afraid I'm stuck."

"I told you so."

"Now, don't say that. Don't rub it in. It's too bad, of course. But there's no use in regretting it."

"What is the matter?"

Von Blumer smiled feebly.

"It might be better," he said, "to ask what isn't the matter. Everything is the matter. In the first place, Mr. Trundle says two cylinders are cracked. That is to say, you start the thing up and it goes splendidly on the floor—but the moment you put it on the road and the machinery gets heated, why, the cracks widen, there's no compression and, of course, no power. That's the trouble, I found. The engine was racing like mad, but we weren't going ahead any—and as for hills, oh, my!"

"But you can get new cylinders."

"Oh, sure! I can get a new machine. That's only one thing, my dear. The bearings are

worn out. The differentials are practically gone. The pistons are no good, and those beautiful tires, which I thought were brand new, were only faced, or reinforced, or whatever they call it, with new rubber, and are practically worthless. As Mr. Trundle says, I was an easy mark."

"I suspected it."

"I know you did. But——" Von Blumer rose with a bright smile. "Never mind, my dear. It's all in a lifetime. I'll get rid of it at the best figure I can and let it go at that. I ought to be able to sell it for almost what I paid for it, less the commission."

"Why didn't you come home in it—was it so bad as that?"

Von Blumer looked sheepish.

"Fact is, I may as well confess that I had a slight accident. I broke the shaft."

"Serious?"

"Well, rather. Now the whole thing will have to be taken down."

"That will be an expense."

"Mr. Trundle will give me an estimate."

"Why not get rid of it as it is?"

"Precisely what I'm going to do, if I can."

The next day Von Blumer presented himself

at the garage where he had bought the machine. He was pretty mad, but kept his temper.

He explained the situation.

"I'm afraid I've been stuck," he said, mildly.

The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"Sorry," he said. "Of course, we cannot guarantee any second-hand machine. All I can say is that when it left here it was all right. You are an amateur?"

"Yes."

The manager shrugged his shoulders again.

"You can ruin the best machine in a couple of hours. The water in the radiator may have been out. The oil may not have been running —possibly there was no oil. You admit you know practically nothing—you say you have been trying the machine all one afternoon. What happened then—who knows?"

The manager leaned over confidentially, while he shrugged his shoulders for the third time.

"Only God knows," he muttered hoarsely.

"That's all right," said Von Blumer, impatiently. "I didn't come here to raise a row. I know when I'm beaten, and I'm not the man to squeal. I want to know if you'll take the machine back and what you'll give me for her."

"Can I interest you in another one? Now here's——"

"Excuse me—no, thank you!"

"But you can't get along without one, sir, in these days. I'll show you a bargain."

"You mean if I'll take another machine you'll allow me something on this one?"

"Yes."

"And if I don't take another machine?"

Fifth shrug.

"Very sorry, sir."

With a supreme effort at restraint, Von Blumer turned on his heel and walked out. There was no use to "kick." He had been buncoed. Now, to get out of it, with as small loss as possible.

During the next two hours he visited half a dozen auto exchanges. At every one he met with the same tale. If the machine he had was in first-class condition and he would give them a "demonstration," they would place it on sale, with the possibility of his getting five hundred or six hundred dollars out of it.

Would they buy it from him in its present condition?

Never! Not at any price.

Then Von Blumer went back to his new

friend, Trundle. That gentleman, aided by two assistants, was on his back under a huge machine, in the centre of his garage. Around him on every side was a heterogeneous mass of automobiles, small ones and big ones, buck-boards, auto-cycles and mechanical odds and ends of every description.

Being a new customer, Mr. Trundle did not keep him waiting more than fifteen minutes before he rose from his work.

"Well, Mr. Trundle, did you make an estimate for that machine?"

"Yes, sir. It will cost you between five hundred and six hundred dollars."

"What!"

"That's right! In the first place, you'll have to get a new engine and a new shaft. That's two hundred dollars right off the bat. Then there are other parts, and there's brazing to be done, and numerous things I can't mention. The whole machine will have to be broken up."

"Broken up?"

"That's what we call it. That is, taken down, every nut and bolt, and put back. It takes time —more time than you'd dream of. Yes, sir, Mr. Von Blumer, it's a hell of a job!"

Von Blumer almost swooned.

Mr. Trundle had the reputation of being an honest mechanic. There was no chance of getting it done anywhere else any cheaper. Besides, Von Blumer didn't want to spend any more—he wanted to get rid of the machine with the best face possible.

"Look here, Trundle," he exclaimed, "here's the whole thing in a nutshell: In a moment of insanity I buy a second-hand automobile, and a few hours after I get it I find I'm stuck. Now, I want to do what any man does when he's caught with a gold brick. I want to pocket my loss and forget it. I don't want to get any deeper in the hole. I'm satisfied. I've had enough. Take the old machine off my hands, Trundle. Pay me anything you please. I'll let you have it for thirty cents."

Trundle shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that it's no use to me."

"What, you don't mean that!"

"Yes, I do, sir. You see, I'm overloaded now. Haven't got half room enough. I'd have to fix that machine up first before I could sell it—no one wants an auto that doesn't go—and when I did make it go I'd be running a risk. No, thank you. I have chances like that

every day. You're asking me to do something that you don't want to do yourself."

"But I'm not in the business. I'm willing to lose. My peace of mind is worth something."

"I understand all that, sir. But there's no money in that sort of thing to me."

"Well, keep the darn thing, Trundle. Perhaps some one will be willing to take it off your hands."

"Sorry I can't do that, Mr. Von Blumer, but I'm overcrowded now. If you wanted to get her fixed up, of course I'd *have* to keep her here while she was being repaired, but I couldn't do it any longer. You can store her somewhere for about fifteen dollars a month."

Von Blumer's face, while Mr. Trundle had been speaking, grew gradually paler.

"As I understand the matter," he said, "I've got on my hands a second-hand elephant that nobody wants and that I can't get rid of. I certainly am not going to pay $15 a month for a useless ornament like that. And I certainly am not going to pay out five hundred or six hundred dollars on the chance of selling her. Trundle, you send her up to my house."

"I'll have to tow her."

"All right, tow her. Do it in the dead of

night, so the neighbors can't see. I cannot spare the room in my barn myself, but I'll keep her there until I think the matter out."

When Von Blumer got home that night he was in no amiable mood.

He explained the situation to his wife.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Charlotte. "There must be some one who wants that machine."

"But who? At first I was willing to sell it at any reasonable figure. Then I found that to do this meant a large outlay. Then I found that I couldn't even give it away."

"How about Cousin Arthur? He's mechanical, and I know he's crazy about automobiles."

"So he is—I hadn't thought of him."

The next day Cousin Arthur was sent for. He was a young bachelor—graduate of a scientific school, just beginning to make his way.

"Cousin Arthur," said Von Blumer, "I've got a little surprise for you. I've got an automobile out here—I purchased it recently at a bargain. It's really a splendid machine, but it doesn't quite suit me. You see, it has a rear entrance. I didn't discover this until after I got it. Of course, this may seem trifling to some people, but you understand, Arthur, that we have to be more or less particular, with our

new social position, in Tiverdale. The manufacturer, of course, will exchange, but it occurred to me that you might like it."

Cousin Arthur's face flushed with pleasurable excitement.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I couldn't afford to buy it from you."

"Not at all."

Von Blumer waved his hand grandly.

"I wouldn't think of such a thing. You only recently attained your majority. Consider this as a slight testimonial. I want to make you a present of it."

Cousin Arthur turned in front of the barn door, overwhelmed with his emotion.

"You can't mean it!" he exclaimed.

"But I do. It's yours."

"This is too much."

"Don't mention it."

Von Blumer threw open the barn door. The reflection of the glistening red paint from the machine gave the flush on Cousin Arthur's face a deeper hue than ever.

"Isn't it a beauty?"

"Splendid."

"You'll take it, won't you? You won't be too proud?"

"Oh, no, I'll take it."

"Promise me you'll take it," said Von Blumer, earnestly.

"Sure thing," replied Cousin Arthur, smiling. "Only too glad. Let's look her over."

"Of course," said Von Blumer, taking off the engine hood as slowly as possible, in order to gain time. "You understood that in addition to the rear entrance I've mentioned, there may be some other defects. But with your training and mechanical mind, it will be a labor of love to fix her up."

In the meantime Cousin Arthur had not been idle. Helping Von Blumer to remove the seats and top hamper, he peered into the inside.

"I see," he whispered, solemnly, at last, "you have a broken shaft—right here—see the crack? Did you know that?"

"Indeed! Possibly there is! Now that you mention it, I believe something may have been said about it."

Cousin Arthur was busy turning the crank.

"It looks to me," he said, "as if there was some serious trouble, also, in the cylinders. There doesn't seem to be any compression. Maybe only the rings. Maybe the metal has

crystallized and cracked. In these old machines——"

"Old machine!" exclaimed Von Blumer. "Does she look it?"

Cousin Arthur smiled.

"There isn't much age or power in paint," he said, sententiously.

He fingered the tires.

"Pretty rotten," he muttered.

Then he backed off and thought.

"Cousin," he said, "it was mighty good of you to offer me that machine, I'm sure. But if it's all the same to you, I won't take it."

"Why not?"

"Well, to put it in condition would take more money than I could save in two years. I can't afford it."

Von Blumer was desperate.

"That's all right," he exclaimed. "But you can't get out of it. You promised."

"Sorry. But——"

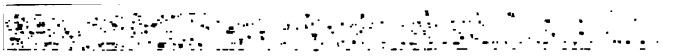
"Aren't you going to keep your word. You've *got* to."

"Excuse me. But——"

Von Blumer faced him.

"All right," he exclaimed. "I shan't forget it. I shall always remember your ingratitude."

"You've GOT to!"



But Cousin Arthur was firm. And thus they parted.

Von Blumer, however, was not discouraged. He was determined to get rid of that automobile if it was a possible thing.

That night he sent a postal card to his junk man—the man who took away his tin cans.

The next afternoon at four that individual appeared on the scene.

Von Blumer led the way to the barn. He pointed to the auto.

"Take it away."

His Italian friend gazed at him in the utmost astonishment.

"Mea taka dat away—whatta for?"

"You remove junk—don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well—that's junk. It's no good—you understand. It doesn't go. I want it removed from my premises. It's in the way here. Take it to the scrap-heap—anything. I don't care."

The Italian scratched his head. He grinned sympathetically, after the manner of his race.

"Too bigga to taka," he said, at last.

"But you can get some one to help you."

"Ha! No place to putta da thing. You breaka her up—den I taka way."

Von Blumer dismissed him and went in and broke the news to his wife, who by this time was afflicted with a nervous fever.

"I don't know what we're going to do," he said, sorrowfully. "I can't sleep a wink as long as I know that awful thing is out there. I want to get rid of it quick. I'm willing to lose money on it, but no one seems to want it."

"I can't understand," sobbed Charlotte, "why that junk man wouldn't take it. He has always been so willing and obliging and respectful to me."

"That's true. But if you'll stop to think for a moment, my dear, you will see that what appears to be a thing of value is in reality the most useless thing on earth, unless it performs its own functions. This Italian, dull as he may be, saw this at once. In order to take the machine away he would have to employ other men. Then he couldn't dump it, as he said, unless it was broken up. To do this means more labor, and to have it on his hands for any length of time would probably cost him more than his entire rent does now."

"I wish," replied Charlotte, "that you might have reasoned this way before you bought the miserable thing."

"Don't reproach me. Remember that we are both young—with youth and strength and determination on our side, we shall get rid of it. Have patience and trust to me. I have an idea!"

So saying, he left his wife and hurried once more to Trundle.

"Mr. Trundle, I'm back again. I want you to do a job for me."

"Very well, Mr. Von Blumer—always glad to accommodate you."

"You know that machine—the one I got stuck with?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I want you to send for it, and take it all to pieces."

"Ah, you have decided to have that work done?"

"No, I haven't. I've decided to have it undone. I find that I cannot dispose of that machine as it is now. It takes up room, and I've got to get rid of it. I *can* sell it for old iron. So if you'll just pull it to pieces, I'll pay you for the time."

Mr. Trundle shook his head.

"I'd like to, Mr. Von Blumer, but I'm afraid I can't."

"Why not? This is straight business. It's a mechanical job. You're doing it every day. I'm good pay."

"That's not the point, sir. You don't understand. Here I'm busy as I can be. Why, sir, whole families are crying for their machines. Now, ain't I putting 'em through as fast as I can? Would it be right for me to deprive my legitimate, natural customers from the use of their machines, even for an hour, while I am taking the time to pull yours apart for an unnatural purpose? I'm human, Mr. Von Blumer. I have a heart in my bosom. Much as I should like to accommodate you, I couldn't do it. It wouldn't be right."

The next day Von Blumer arranged his affairs at the office and came home and settled quietly and methodically and desperately down to work.

It was a complicated job, pulling apart that motor car. It took many a hard wrench. But at the end of a week it was all done. Von Blumer broke up the body and used it for kindling wood. He put the cushions on his piazza chairs, and he stored the searchlights in the barn. Aside from these, nothing remained but

a pile of old iron and steel and fixings. Then he sent for the junk man.

"There," said Von Blumer, triumphantly, as he gestured towards the pile. "How much will you give me for the lot?"

The Italian swept the pile with his eye.

"Two dolla."

"All right. I'll take it—provided you remove the stuff at once."

The Italian handed him the money—taken from a greasy pocketbook. At this moment Charlotte called.

"My dear?"

"Yes. I'm coming."

"Here's a man who wants to collect a bill."

Von Blumer, looking in his overalls like one of Mr. Trundle's assistants, gazed at the bill handed him by the boy. It was for ten gallons of gasoline, at twenty cents—total, two dollars. Without a word, he handed over the money he had just received. Then he looked up at his wife with a bright smile.

"My dear," he exclaimed, "that, I guess, is the only part of the old machine that hasn't cost me a cent."

And Charlotte smiled back, for she was rapidly recovering her health and spirits.

"Better than that, my dear. For, if you remember, you only used about three gallons of gasoline, and I saved the rest to clean my gloves with."

XIX

IN WHICH THE VON BLUMERS GIVE A DINNER, WITH IMPORTANT RESULTS

JERRY was himself again.

The automobile incident had plainly disconcerted him. For whole days he had moped. Von Blumer, as he afterwards said to Charlotte, could scarcely get a word out of him.

"Do you mean to say," she asserted, "that you actually talk to that horse?"

"Better than that, my dear. He talks to me. This reminds me that he made a suggestion yesterday which—well, it may be worth considering."

Charlotte's plan for a dinner of retaliation to the Dimpletons had set Von Blumer thinking. It occurred to him that Jerry was a good medium through which to approach her with his advice. That gentle animal had more than

once been the means of destroying discord. Why not now?

"Have you got that dinner planned?" he added.

"You mean the dinner to the Dimpletons?"

"Yes—the one in which you propose to get even."

"Don't say that."

"That's the truth, isn't it?"

"No, no. I simply wish——"

"I understand. Have you made up your mind to have butter?"

"No."

"Have you made up your mind to have serving-plates?"

"Yes."

"Bread going to be cut thin?"

"No, no."

"Is it going to be a Ladies' Home Journal dinner or a Woman's Home Companion dinner?"

"Neither," said Charlotte, with a scornful glance. "It is going to be given according to the very best form."

"And incidentally put Mrs. Dimpleton in the shade."

"That is a horrid way for you to put it. I

don't intend anything of the sort. I merely wish to establish myself on the proper footing."

"But you admit that Mrs. Dimpleton is already established on the proper footing, and she has butter at her dinners. When you are living in Tiverdale, why don't you do as the Tiverdalians do?"

His wife raised her head haughtily.

"Why is it," she said, "that you persist in discussing a matter that you don't understand?"

"But I do understand it. I understand it a good deal better than you think I do. Besides, Jerry agrees with me perfectly."

With this he hurried off to catch his train, and sat with Dimpleton all the way in and played whist. The bond which united him to this gentleman was becoming more firmly established every day.

The next week Von Blumer broached the subject again.

"How about that dinner?" he said. "Well, have you decided to have butter?"

"Of course not."

"When is it coming off?"

"Next Thursday."

"Have you notified Major Buddway?"

"I have."

"I met him yesterday and he asked me what he was to wear. I told him to come in low neck and short sleeves."

"You seem to have taken a violent dislike to that dinner. What are you driving at now?"

Von Blumer closed the door. His face grew more serious.

"There are times," he said, "when you have some respect for my opinion."

"Certainly."

"Then I want you to have it now. I want you to throw aside all levity and get down to business. We are giving a dinner——"

"Why don't you tell me something I don't know?"

"We are giving a dinner," continued Von Blumer. "This dinner includes Mr. and Mrs. Dimpleton, Major Buddway and Mrs. Willoby and her daughter, and it is your firm intention, by every means in your power, to make Mrs. Dimpleton feel as uncomfortable as possible. She has voluntarily given you the advantage over her by inviting you first, thereby enabling you to see all of her culinary defects. Now, what you propose to do is to make just as much of an enemy of her as the superiority of your

dinner over hers can do, and I want to tell you, my dear, that you are making an awful mistake. Now, you think it over. You take my advice and have just the kind of dinner Mrs. Dimpleton had, no better and no worse. If she had only two candles on the table, don't you double that number. If she doesn't bother to have serving-plates, don't you have them, and if she thought wise to have butter-plates and good, honest butter and thin bread, you do the same. We are living in a community where one of the secrets of success is not to put on too many frills. I am not going to say any more about it. I am going to leave it to your good sense and judgment."

With this he sauntered out of the room, leaving his disturbed wife to her own reflections.

The night of the dinner arrived. Late in the afternoon Major Buddway, perspiring and cheerful, appeared on the scene.

"You have," said Von Blumer, after mutual greetings, "a great treat in store for you." He looked at the Major fondly. "Are you as susceptible as ever?" he asked.

"A beautiful woman," replied the Major, "will ever remain to me the finest specimen of God's handiwork. My boy, the longer I live

the more deeply I am impressed with this fundamental fact."

"Very well! Then prepare to meet your fate. There is in this town a lady named Willoby. She is a woman of experience, and in the prime of life. I have arranged that you shall sit next to her, and I expect that you will fall in love with her at first sight."

"Is she handsome?" said the Major.

"Fairly so. But more than that, she is intelligent. She knows everything."

The dinner began promptly at seven o'clock, the guests arriving on the minute. As they entered the dining-room, Von Blumer could scarcely conceal a secret smile of triumph. As he saw signs of butter, he knew that he had gained the day.

"Mrs. Von Blumer," said Mrs. Willoby, when the dinner had gained impetus, "I want you to join the Woman's Club."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Von Blumer, "that I am not equal to it."

"Not equal to it!" said Major Buddway. "My dear madam, I am sure that you would grace any organization. What do you do?" he asked Mrs. Willoby.

"Our scheme for the coming season," replied

that lady, "has not been entirely formulated yet. We have a class in Bible study, one in Greek art, some research in Hindu mysticism, a botanical ramble class, Egyptian scarabs, Vedic philosophy, the Parallelogisms of Kant, infant diet, domestic science and cookery, French and German, Sociology, and, I think, if we have time, we shall go over a few of the old masters."

"The only objection I see to your scheme," said the Major, with a smile, "is that it doesn't give you enough to do. And, besides, these things are too trivial. When you study trivial things you become, in a sense, too giddy."

Mrs. Willoby was not abashed.

"Now you are laughing at us," she said, "something which we don't tolerate."

"My dear madam," replied the Major, "I can assure you that nothing that a body of women attempts, no matter how foolish it is, is a subject for irreverence. My only concern is that you will get to know so much that we shall not be able to worship you properly."

The next morning Dimpleton came up to Von Blumer in the station.

"I am glad you took this train," he said. "I want to say a few words of congratulation."

"On what?"

"On that dinner you gave last night. And, incidentally—I feel I know you well enough now to talk frankly?"

"Certainly."

They sank down on the same seat.

"That dinner," said Dimpleton, "was one of the best dinners I ever sat down to, and one of the reasons I enjoyed it so much was because you people knew instinctively just what the right thing was. You may not know it, but it has been a custom in Tiverdale, for some time, when new people arrive—I am speaking now in the strictest confidence——"

"I understand."

"To give," said Dimpleton, "what is called a test dinner. That is to say, when we ask any new people to dine with us, we make a point not to put on any more frills than absolutely necessary. We do so on purpose. You understand that when it comes to a real swell function, we don't take lessons from any one, but there is a kind of spirit about this place which precludes any social rivalry, and so when we dine any one new we just give them a comfortable, commonplace kind of dinner, and then wait for the returns."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, when the return dinner comes," said Dimpleton, "if the person whom we have dined attempts to show *us* how to give a dinner—tries to outdo us—why, then they are out of it from that time forth, so far as the real people of Tiverdale are concerned. And it pleased me very much, my dear boy, to know that you are the real people; that you didn't attempt anything of this sort, and that now we may welcome you for all time. Of course, I knew it beforehand. I knew Mrs. Von Blumer. I was positive that she would never make a mistake like that."

Von Blumer leaned over and put his arm around his friend.

"That's right," he replied. "When it comes to doing the right thing I can count on Mrs. Von Blumer every time!"

"Also on Jerry and me!" he said to himself placidly.

XX

IN WHICH LITERATURE AND WOMEN ARE HOPELESSLY ENTANGLED

"I HAVE been thinking," said Von Blumer, one morning a few weeks after the dinner-party, "that it might not be a bad idea to have Major Buddway come out and live with us—at least, pay us at first a visit, and then, if it doesn't agree with us, I know him well enough and he knows me well enough to call the thing off. We have been married long enough to tolerate our friends, don't you think?"

Charlotte looked at him doubtfully. "Have you spoken to the Major?" she said.

"Of course not. But I think he would come."

"I don't think it would be a good thing at all. At the same time, I think something ought to be done to enable him to see more of Mrs. Willoby."

Charlotte, in common with her sex, was an instinctive matchmaker.

"I believe," she went on, "that those two people are thoroughly well suited to each other. Suppose you ask him out often at first. Perhaps the thing will progress so rapidly that he will be getting married before it is necessary for him to become our guest. You haven't," she added, anxiously, "mentioned Mrs. Willoby to him? It might scare him off."

"You needn't be worried about his being scared off," replied Von Blumer. "Major Buddway has already been married twice, and I don't believe anyone can beat him in ability at engineering a courtship. If he has made up his mind to marry Mrs. Willoby, as I suspect he has, that lady has absolutely no hope left."

"What makes you think he has?"

"Some certain indications, perhaps indefinable, but none the less unmistakable. From the moment he saw Mrs. Willoby the Major has become a changed man. You wait until you see him."

"Are you going to join that Woman's Club?" he added, abruptly changing the subject.

"I have."

"So I thought. I noticed it about the house."

"Noticed it? What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mrs. Willoby seems to have hypnotized you, and that your mind, instead of being here, where it ought to be, is getting switched off. I don't mind your becoming interested in society and religion, both of which in moderate instalments are wholesome. But if you are going to get a woman's-club bee in your bonnet, I don't know what is going to happen to us. Think of our child," he added, earnestly.

"Nonsense! I don't mind telling you, however, that I have been asked to read a paper."

"I knew it! I knew it was coming. Well, please get over it as quickly as possible."

He kissed her and made off for the train. He was not altogether displeased with his morning's conversation. If he could get Major Buddway safely married to Mrs. Willoby this would remove that lady's unconscious influence from his wife. The fact that she herself was favorable to this matrimonial possibility was a great point in his favor.

On his way to the train he met Dimpleton.

"Is your wife interested in the Woman's Club?"

"Mildly so," replied Dimpleton.

"Does it do her any harm?"

Dimpleton smiled. "Are you getting worried," he replied, "because your wife has joined it?"

"Well, I don't know. It may be a good thing. But I suspect any movement of that sort. At the present moment I am fairly well satisfied. Once or twice in my life I have had to sit in the offices of servant-girl agents, arranging for some derelict cook to play a one-night stand in my house. There have been times when I have even had to set the table myself and take care of the baby. But, generally speaking, Mrs. Von Blumer has stood at the helm in almost all kinds of weather and piloted us through without calling all hands to shorten sail."

Von Blumer had once been on a sea voyage and occasionally he dropped into nautical phraseology.

"But whether," he continued, "this Woman's Club movement is going to take my wife's mind away from home is at present only a matter of speculation. Maybe she has only got a little touch of it. All I know is that she is preparing some kind of a paper. This looks suspicious. The fact is that I am a little bit afraid of Mrs. Willoby. She impresses me as

being a very insidious lady. She is literary to the backbone and has a certain charm that I imagine is quite persuasive with her sex. Otherwise, the Woman's Club would not be so popular as it is."

"There is some truth in that," replied Dimpleton. "Did you ever meet Scoop? Here he comes now."

"No. But I've seen him. What does he do?"

"Well, Scoop is connected with the Allover Magazine. Scoop is intellectual. He knows Mrs. Willoby, and he has made a study of the Woman's Movement. I think if we approach Scoop in the right way you may gather some valuable information about the danger that exists for your wife. Here, Scoop, I want you to meet Von Blumer. We had a very charming dinner at his house the other night, and I am only sorry that you were not there, although the last time you met Mrs. Willoby she couldn't get a word out of you."

He turned to Von Blumer in explanation. "Mrs. Willoby," he said, "was just crazy to talk with Mr. Scoop about literary things, because, you know, he is an expert. He is a kind of professional literary man, and she

vanted to pump him dry. Well, do you know, Scoop wouldn't talk about anything else but he weather and the crops and the frightful rain service."

Scoop smiled. "I am too old a bird," he said, "to be caught in any such net. I like Mrs. Willoby. She is a charming woman. The trouble with her is that she wants to be literary and doesn't know how. Now, in my opinion, there are three kinds of women: masculine, feminine and neuter. Mrs. Willoby is distinctly feminine, wants to be masculine, and when she is she is only neuter. Consequently, when I talk to her I enjoy her as a woman, but not in any other sense. I have one or two contributors who are writing for my magazine—women, you understand—and yet, in my discussions with them no question of sex ever comes up. To me they are men, pure and simple. That is to say, they have taught themselves the trick of thinking like men. And, generally speaking, women are such good actresses that it is hard to detect the illusion."

"This is all new ground to me," said Von Blumer. "I didn't suppose such subtle distinctions existed. But I have often wondered why it was that so many magazines have so many

women writing for them. Now, you take my wife—she is as feminine a woman as you ever saw, but when it comes to reading a story, strange to say, she runs to blood and thunder; that is, she likes to read stories of adventure, stories that thrill. Now, as I understand it, if you are trying to interest women all over the country, why do you publish so many things by women, when feminine minds usually seek the opposite of what they are themselves?"

Scoop smiled again. "You have hit upon one secret," he said, "and that is the question of opposites. What you say is perfectly true. That is one of the reasons why we employ women contributors, because they themselves are apt to write the most virile stuff. You take a thin, anæmic, apparently spiritless-looking girl who comes into my office, and who is one of our best contributors, and some of the stories that she turns out would make your blood run cold. On the other hand, sometimes a great big overgrown giant of a man comes in with a wishy-washy, pale, thin material that would be even too weak for a Sunday-school library."

"But what is the matter with Mrs. Willoby?" broke in Dimpleton. "She has had op-

portunities for study perhaps unusual. Her husband died long enough ago to give her leisure. Then she was interested in her daughter's education and started in to furnish her mind with all that was best, both in art and literature. Why should you not find pleasure in discussing intellectual subjects with a woman of that sort? She's in her prime—not over forty-five, I should say—with experience and tact."

"Because," replied Scoop, "she is not the real thing; that is, not so far as literature is concerned. Take, for instance, her observations on Greek art as I listened to them without comment on the evening that I saw her. Although she has been to Greece, has read text-books on Greek art, has been through various courses of study, she has no more conception of the force and virility of the Hermes of Praxiteles than if that statue were a wooden Indian. To disagree with her in any discussion on the subject would have been impossible, because you cannot treat a woman of Mrs. Willoby's standing and position in any other way than as a woman. If, however, one of my women contributors should make an observation on Greek art which I did not agree with I could talk with her as if she were a man."

"But don't you think," said Dimpleton, "that supposing you had a wife, you would enjoy life in her companionship very much more if, in addition to her charm as a woman, she was equipped with as much knowledge as Mrs. Willoby? Wouldn't the monotony of married life be sweetened just in proportion as her knowledge is broad?"

This time Scoop laughed.

"I don't know how it is with you," he said, turning to Von Blumer, "but I know that you," indicating Dimpleton, "from what you have said, have always been a little bit jealous of your wife's part in the Woman's Club. I think you have displayed some little feeling about her going there so much. Seems to me I heard you say one day, when you were, perhaps, overwrought, 'Damn the Woman's Club.' Now, why shouldn't you let your wife get the benefit of some of this knowledge, if it makes of her so much more an interesting companion? Do you want to change her off for Mrs. Willoby? Or put it this way: Suppose you were cast away on a desert island with an intellectual woman. After you had settled down and discovered enough leguminous food to exist upon, and had arranged your domestic schedule to suit the

occasion, would you like to spend your leisure time in listening to your companion's views on Greek art, on socialism or on the impressionistic school? And if she should persist in this, wouldn't you, at the end of ten days, quietly go off to the other end of the island and cheerfully drown yourself?"

"I guess we would!" chorused both Von Blumer and Dimpleton.

"Well, now," said Scoop, "let's carry it a little bit further. Suppose your companion, instead of being an intellectual woman, was an intellectual man. Mind you—there are plenty of intellectual men who are deadly bores, but I am speaking about an intellectual man who has about as much of an intellectual equipment as an intellectual woman to whom I have just referred. You don't get so tired of him. Why?"

"I suppose," said Dimpleton, "when you come right down to it, that the difference is really anatomical. A man's opinion about any subject which he has studied is not so likely to be a second-hand opinion."

"That is it," replied Scoop. "A man, for instance, who has made a study of the Greeks has, within the depths of his own masculinity, enough of that savagery, that wild, primitive

instinct which he not only gets by inheritance, but also by his own training, which enables him more fully to assimilate the spirit of a great people who started out, and who succeeded in setting the pace for the rest of the world for all time. Now, the average woman who belongs to a woman's club and who reads Greek art takes on, like a chameleon, the various colors of every authority that she studies. The consequence is that when you talk with her it is very much like listening to a composite phonograph of all that she has read."

"You seem," said Von Blumer, "to have a tremendous dislike for intellectual women. I thought I was bad enough, but you are worse than I am."

"Not at all," said Scoop. "The real point of the whole matter is that what we term the intellectual is, in reality, a sham, and has always been a sham since the first priest arose to throw dust in the eyes of his constituents. The first priest delivered orisons and wrote screeds, to impress the ignorant with his own superiority, and the plain people from that time forth fell into the habit of being fooled by all those who came to cultivate the gift of expression. There has always been a kind of glamor about the

profession of literature. For one thing, those who have pursued it have had things all their own way. So many of them have laid down rules of style and have raised artificial standards so often that it is no wonder that feminine minds should be, time and again, lured away by false signals. And yet, it is a fact that all the great stuff in literature has had no style, except its own. And only that which has pictured some form of human life has lived to tell the tale."

"What has this to do with Mrs. Willoby?" said Dimpleton.

"Only this," replied Scoop. "That the feminine part of Mrs. Willoby is infinitely more valuable and more interesting than the intellectual part of most men. That is," he smiled, "if what I have seen of her beneath her artificial crust is correct."

"I wish," groaned Von Blumer, "that I could persuade my wife to believe this. Personally, and speaking privately to you two men, I have the utmost respect for her ability, and she isn't an intellectual woman either. I think she would bore me if she knew too much, as you have suggested, but I am very much afraid if she continues with that Woman's

Club there is going to be trouble ahead for me. That is," he added, "unless I can get Mrs. Willoby married off."

Scoop looked at him sharply. "To whom?" he said.

But Von Blumer dodged.

"Oh, to anybody that comes along that happens to be suitable. It seems to me that a woman like Mrs. Willoby ought to get married."

"I didn't know," said Scoop, "but what you had somebody in view."

"Oh, no. Nobody specially in view."

They left the train, and Scoop hurried off to catch an uptown boat.

"Your friend," said Von Blumer, "seems to be a very bright fellow. He is certainly an expert when it comes to literary matters. I didn't suppose that the editor of a magazine in these days ever had time to learn so much."

Dimpleton looked at him deprecatingly.

"He isn't the editor," he said.

"Not the editor? Why, I understood you to say he was."

Dimpleton smiled. "No," he replied. "He is the advertising manager. There was a time when the editors of magazines amounted to some-

thing, but all this is changed. The advertising manager is the one who now exercises both the business and editorial functions. And Scoop tells me the production of a magazine is just as much of a science as that of insurance. The emotions of the readers are all carefully tabulated and the proper combinations of sentiment, adventure, home mixtures, and other concoctions are produced by trained bands of literary sharps, with the same precision and exact accuracy that turns out sewing-machines."

"Well," said Von Blumer, "I am delighted to have met him, because he has relieved my mind greatly about Mrs. Willoby. To tell you the truth, I hope my friend, Major Buddway, may take it into his head to marry her, but I feel a little guilty all the time, on account of her knowledge. Now that I learn from such an expert that she is really such a charming person underneath I shall feel more free to act."

"Judging from what I've seen of your friend, the Major," said Dimpleton, "he's pretty well able to take care of himself."

XXI

IN WHICH MAJOR BUDDWAY, MR. SCOOP AND MRS. VON BLUMER ALL DEVELOP AN EXTRAORDINARY ACTIVITY, EACH IN A DIFFERENT WAY

AS soon as possible Von Blumer dropped in on the Major. That gentleman, who had the faculty of never appearing to be busy, sat in his private office. He greeted Von Blumer heartily, but somewhat nervously.

"Can you come out," said Von Blumer, "and spend Sunday?"

"Thank you," replied the Major. "Nothing would please me better. I think a breath of country air would do me good." He paced the floor nervously. "The fact is," he said, "I am a little bit under the weather." He got up and sat down.

"What's the matter? Something is wrong.

I can't imagine what. You appear to be different."

Then the truth broke in on him. "Why!" he exclaimed, "you are not smoking." He never remembered before seeing the Major without a cigar.

"No, sir, I am not. And, what is more, never again!"

Von Blumer suddenly remembered hearing Mrs. Willoby remark that she hated tobacco smoke. The campaign had opened. He chuckled to himself.

"You mean to say that you have stopped?"

The Major inflated his Falstaffian chest as he looked firmly in his friend's eye.

"My boy," he said, "live and learn. I have recently made a discovery. Every pleasure is an illegitimate one when the effect of it stops with its performance. Now, you take smoking, for instance. I crave a cigar——"

Von Blumer put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a large, fragrant Havana. "Do you?" he replied, perniciously. "Then satisfy your craving."

The Major pushed him away. "Never," he replied. "I repeat, I crave a cigar, and while I am smoking it—say, for twenty minutes or

so, I am enjoying it. The moment I stop, however, the reaction begins and I am unhappy until I start the next one. Now, a real pleasure gets better all the time. After we hear a particularly fine piece of music, for example, it does us good for weeks afterward. If we read a poem, it may become a part of us as long as we live, and color all of our actions. But the pleasures of the senses, unless they are carefully guarded, are dangerous. None of them for me."

"I suppose that you would like to play golf as soon as you get out to the house. We can start right in as soon as we get there, if the weather is good, so that we needn't lose a moment from the time you arrive until you leave."

The Major looked at him doubtfully.

"That might not be a bad idea. But the fact is, Henry, I have been very busy lately. I have got one or two duties that I am thinking about, and I don't know but what I shall have to ask you to let me off, say, on Sunday, for a quiet walk by myself. I find, oftentimes, a walk in the country enables me to clear my mind better than anything else."

"Certainly. Just the thing. Do as you please."

He hurried home that afternoon to tell the glad news to his wife.

On Saturday, just before dinner, the Major arrived on the scene. He was dressed in a brand-new suit of clothes. He had on a red cravat. He carried a stick, and there was about him an almost indefinable air of jauntiness, combined, perhaps, with a touch of nervousness, due to his abstinence from cigars.

Von Blumer took the first opportunity after his arrival to interview Mrs. Von Blumer. "Did you notice it?" he said, in an excited whisper. "He's got it bad. I tell you the Major is as full of sentiment to-day as he was at twenty!"

"Isn't it splendid!" replied Charlotte. "It seems to me they are perfectly fitted for each other."

The next day the Major, in pursuit of his previous suggestion, walked off by himself.

The Von Blumer house was on a slight eminence. By going up to the attic, and climbing up a pair of steps, it was possible to get onto the roof, and from this coign of vantage one could get a fairly good view of the surrounding country. Von Blumer, secretly ashamed of

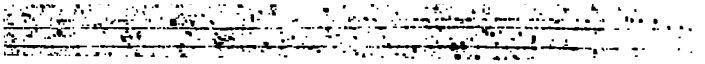
his curiosity, but unable to resist it, hastened up there with a pair of opera-glasses. It took him but a short time to locate the Major's portly form. His head was held erect. He swung his stick with an air of confidence that gave to Von Blumer's lofty vigil a sense of security for the future. His immaculate silk hat gleamed in the sun like the helmet of a conquering hero. He had gone out of the Von Blumers' house in the opposite direction from the Willoby mansion, but Von Blumer almost cried aloud as, after walking two squares down, he turned to his right and made a detour back again along the next street. Finally, with a cry of triumph, Von Blumer saw him walk up the steps and ring the bell at the Willobys'.

"It's all right," he said to Charlotte, as he descended. "Now, all we have to do is to sit around and wait for the wedding-bells to ring. We mustn't hurry him, my dear. He knows his business best. All we have to do is to invite him here as often as possible, and let him alone."

"You seem to be terribly anxious about this thing."

"Merely the desire of an old friend to make another friend happy."

ok him but a short time to locate the Major's portly form.



But his wife did not altogether believe him.

The next week the Major came out, as before, at precisely the same hour, and excused himself again for a walk. Impelled by the same curiosity, although it seemed foolish, when he already knew beforehand where the Major was going, Von Blumer once more mounted the steps to the roof and followed the Major along his predestined path.

Suddenly, however, as the form of his friend reached the steps of the Willoby mansion, Von Blumer was conscious that within the focus of his glass, like some strange planet that had swum into his ken, another form obtruded itself, another figure was going up the steps of the Willoby mansion.

Von Blumer almost dropped his glasses. Then, with a firmer grip, he fastened them once more on the new object.

It was Scoop! Scoop, the versatile and brilliant advertising manager! Scoop, who hated an intellectual woman!

"Rivals!" muttered Von Blumer, between his set teeth. He hurried downstairs to his wife. He grabbed her vigorously by the shirt-waist. He rushed her into the library. He closed the door.

"Prepare yourself," he said, "for an awful sensation. The Major is not alone!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Scoop has entered the lists against him." And then briefly he told his story.

From that time forth there was more than enough news in Tiverdale to keep Von Blumer busy. He encouraged the Major to come out often. He was making up his mind, as a matter of personal pride, that he would put nothing in that gentleman's way to prevent him from winning the fair hand of Mrs. Willoby.

But there was another matter that disturbed Von Blumer almost as much as the love-affair of the Major.

And that was his wife.

For days that lady had been occupied with writing-materials. Bobby Von Blumer, that human barometer of his mother's constancy to home, was betraying evidences of her abstraction and had almost become—in a few weeks would be—that frightful modern product, a spoiled child.

Von Blumer wanted to know what his wife was writing about, but he felt that it would be

derogatory to his dignity to ask her. And so he held his peace, waiting for developments.

"Your wife," said Dimpleton, one morning, "is making great progress."

"Yes, yes," replied Von Blumer, not wishing to betray his own ignorance.

"Mrs. Dimpleton tells me that the paper she read the day before yesterday at the Club meeting made a great sensation."

"Indeed! You know, she is modest about such things. Tell me about it. What was the subject?"

"I only heard my wife speak of it casually. She said it was short and to the point—something about the management of husbands."

"Good heavens!" said Von Blumer. "Is it as bad as that?"

For some days thereafter he worried about the situation more than ever. It was evident that the Major, if he was not making progress, was by no means discouraged, because his visits had even extended into the week-days. But Von Blumer was getting so impatient that he couldn't wait. It seemed to him that if he could get Mrs. Willoby safely married he might be able to win Mrs. Von Blumer back to her domestic duties, and if there was one thing that

Von Blumer disliked more than anything else, it was suspense. And so, as the weeks went by, he grew thin with waiting and weary with that subtle disintegration which had set in among his household affairs.

One Sunday, however, as he arose, an indefinable something in the air made him feel, with that subtle prescience by which we often scent things, that a crisis was arriving. The Major, who had risen early, seemed more cheerful than ever, and Mrs. Von Blumer, on her part, was not nearly so abstracted as she had been.

Von Blumer waited. At six o'clock in the afternoon, as he was sitting down on the piazza, the Major came up from his weekly walk. There was about him that calm, peaceful, satisfied air of the man who has accomplished what he set out for. His nervousness had disappeared.

The two men sat for some time in silence; then the Major leaned over confidentially, and said: "My friend, what would we do without love? Thank God, that to-day my heart is as young and fresh and buoyant as ever!"

Von Blumer looked at him encouragingly.

"Major, it's more so. Why shouldn't it be? As we grow older, our sentiments broaden and

deepen. We come to realize that, after all, love is the only thing in life."

"That is true!" exclaimed the Major. "I am glad to hear you say so. Now, there are some people who might think I was too old to get married—as if," he added, "a man is ever too old to get married." He looked around cautiously, and lowered his voice.

"Henry," he whispered. "Did you suspect anything—about me?"

"Well, yes. I have, in a dim kind of way, hoped that something might happen."

"Well, it has. I think you ought to know about it. To-day I have succeeded in winning the loveliest, sweetest, dearest, and most entrancing little woman in the whole world. I can't believe it's true."

Von Blumer sprang up and grasped his friend by the hand.

"Major," he said, with the tears in his eyes, "I can't tell you how glad I am this has happened. It was the dream of my life. I trembled for fear that you wouldn't get there."

The Major smiled. "Get there!" he replied. "Did you ever know me to fail? No, sir! I have had experience. Besides, true love, while it may have to wait, always wins out."

"I know it does, and I feel now really guilty to think that I have doubted your final victory." He leaned over still more confidentially. "But, Major, I am a novice at these things. Tell me, will you, how you managed Scoop?"

The Major smiled broadly. "I didn't manage him at all. I just let him have his own way. He got what he wanted, and I got what I wanted."

"What do you mean? You don't mean to say that you are both going to marry Mrs. Willoby?"

The Major's portly form shook with amusement. "Good gracious, no!" he said. "You didn't think I was going to marry her, did you? I am going to marry her daughter!"

"Of course, of course," stammered Von Blumer; "certainly."

There was a long silence. Then Von Blumer said: "Will you excuse me a moment?" and walked into the house. He was breathless with excitement. He could scarcely wait to tell Charlotte the news.

He found her calmly sitting in the library with a mass of papers before her on the desk.

"Well, dear," he whispered, "it's all over with. Only, what do you think! The Major

is going to marry Mrs. Willoby's daughter, and Scoop—you know Scoop—he is going to marry Mrs. Willoby."

Charlotte looked up abstractedly. It seemed to take her some time to gather what he had said.

"Did you hear?" he asked. "I say that Scoop is going to marry Mrs. Willoby."

"So I heard last night. Do you know, I forgot to speak of it."

"Forgot! How in the world could you forget a thing like that? Isn't it great? Isn't it grand? Now, you won't want to go to the Woman's Club again, will you?" he said.

Charlotte drummed idly with her pen on the desk.

"Why not?" she asked. "I suppose I might as well tell you that yesterday Mrs. Willoby resigned, and they elected me president in her place."

Her astonished husband gazed at her for a moment speechlessly. This was an occasion where words were superfluous. Then, silent, sorrowing, and stunned, he turned his back and walked downstairs instinctively toward his friend.

As he went through the door out onto the

piazza, he stopped. There was an unmistakable something in the air which caused him to hurry hastily forward, where he could view his love-sick friend.

His senses had not misguided him. The Major lolled back in the blissful attitude of a man at peace with all the world.

He was smoking a large, fragrant Havana.

XXII

IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT OF THE WOMAN'S CLUB IS TREATED AS SOMEBODY THINKS SHE DESERVES

EVERY normal American man is afraid of his wife.

He carries this fear about with him as a kind of secret possession, a sort of bulwark in emergencies, an ever-present help in time of trouble. By means of this fear his instincts become more sensitive, and this enables him to move along the lines of least resistance.

Not that he is altogether a hopeless slave. He toils by the sweat of his mind, in order that his wife may be decently gowned, and he permits himself to be dominated by that active creature in so many ways that it becomes natural to him to exercise habits of secretiveness when he is independent. There are, however, times when he rises up and rebels.

Von Blumer was no exception to this rule. Hitherto he had been tractable, because there was no reason not to be. But, as he beheld the spectacle of his good wife being led into temptation, he cast aside all restrictions, and determined to have it out with her.

This course was not undertaken without previous consideration. In fact, his feelings were, in a certain sense, cumulative. The more he thought about it, the madder he got.

It was natural for him to choose the most inopportune moment to approach his wife. All husbands in crises of this sort may be relied upon to do this. Mrs. Von Blumer had just had an interview with the cook, which, coming on top of her Woman's Club duties, had put her in no amiable mood. This, however, made no difference to Von Blumer. He closed the door and shut out the outside world with decision and firmness.

"Now," he said, "I want to know what this means."

"What what means?"

"I want to know what business you have to become interested in a woman's club to the extent of being its president, without first consulting me. I won't have it!"

Charlotte's mind was apparently on her cook —or anywhere else.

"I don't want to talk about it," she replied. "I'm tired to death."

She turned and looked at him as she spoke, and suddenly realized that there was something in his face which demanded consideration. "Must you talk about it?" she said.

"Yes."

"I don't understand you. Haven't I a right to do as I please?"

"No! Not without consulting me. I don't like it. It's all wrong. You can't attend to your household duties and go through all this literary flub-dub. You owe something to me and Bobby and Jerry. Of course," he added, with a slight attempt at concession, "I want you to go around and have a good time and do as you please. But this Woman's Club business is insidious. It won't be long before you will be writing for the magazines, and then all hope will be lost. I know how it is. Scoop has told me all about it. I simply won't permit it, that's all. It has gone far enough as it is."

"What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. You've gone too far already. I've seen it gradually developing in

your mind—this fatal, foolish ambition. I simply won't permit it."

Charlotte's face flushed.

"You won't permit it?" she repeated. "How are you going to help yourself? What are you going to do about it?"

This possibility Von Blumer had not considered. There seemed to be no reply for him to make. He was silent.

His wife continued. "I suppose we might as well understand each other. I've been blind all along, and have gone about doing my domestic duties uncomplainingly and without realizing my own possibilities as a woman. But the moment has come at last when I have wakened, and I propose no longer to be bound down to commonplace drudgery."

She went on, gathering her anger rapidly. "You are independent. You go and come as you please. You choose your own companions. You do practically what you like without consulting me. I claim the same privilege. I find myself suddenly, by a fortunate accident, brought face to face with untold possibilities, and I refuse to be bound down within my hitherto narrow limit. As president of the Woman's Club I shall have opportunities that I

never dreamed of before, and you can't stop me. I'm not dependent upon you, Henry Von Blumer! Remember Acacia!"

This was a great deal more than her husband had bargained for.

"All right!" he exclaimed. "You wish me to take you at your word? As I understand the matter, you are proclaiming your independence."

"Yes."

"You said just now that I was free to come and go as I pleased, and to do as I pleased, and I gathered that you thought that you had not been free up to this time, to do these things."

"I haven't been."

Von Blumer went over and sat down in his favorite chair. His face was now calm and peaceful.

"I think I see, my dear, just what you mean. It's been an unequal thing. You have been circumscribed and I haven't been. You have had the monotony of existence forced upon you, while I have been free to indulge in possibilities for myself. You think this is unjust?"

"I certainly do."

"You think," continued Von Blumer, "that each of us ought to be on the same basis. That

instead of our being mutually dependent upon each other—me in my sphere, and you in yours —each of us ought to be free to act entirely separate from the other."

Charlotte looked at him curiously. "Is this an argument?" she said. "Because if it is, I don't want to talk any more."

"Don't they argue at the Woman's Club? I thought that was one of your objects—to get together and discuss things. Didn't you read a paper the other day on 'The Management of Husbands'?"

"No, I didn't! I read a paper on 'Relaxation,' and incidentally I mentioned husbands, and I suppose some reporter thought he would be so smart as to insinuate that I had lectured on such a matter."

"Well, it doesn't matter. The only point I am driving at is, that you ought to give me the same consideration you would give any member of the Woman's Club who asked you questions."

"Well, well! What is it you want to know?"

Von Blumer lighted a cigar. "All I wanted to know is this," he said—"just how far the independence of each of us is to go. You told me just now that I had practically done as I

pleased. Now, you know, my dear, that isn't quite so."

"Don't you meet new people every day? Don't you go to dinners? Don't you make business trips which enable you to get some variety into your life?"

"Certainly. I also stay at home as much as possible, because I am rather fond of your society. That is to say, I am very much more fond of your society than I am of the society of the president of the Woman's Club."

"You are horrid to say that!"

"I know it, but I can't help it."

Charlotte rose decisively. "I don't care. I'm going to do as I please. I'm going to be independent, after this."

"All right. You have no objection to my being the same, have you?"

"Certainly not. I think it is right that both husband and wife should be permitted to develop themselves as they choose."

"Splendid! I agree with you perfectly." But in his heart he sorrowed.

The next morning, as he went to the train, he met Scoop and Dimpleton. Scoop had a red rose in his buttonhole. He wore it somewhat consciously, as if in anticipation of some

of those inevitable things which every newly married man has to submit to, whether he will or no.

"Did you get the invitation to that little dinner they are going to give me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Von Blumer, "I did, and I felt very much complimented."

"You are going, are you not?"

It happened that the date of this dinner was the anniversary of Von Blumer's wedding, and when he received the invitation he had given up the idea at once. Since his interview with Charlotte, however, things were different.

"I shall be delighted," he replied. "Are you going?" he asked Dimpleton.

"I wouldn't miss it for anything," said Dimpleton. "I have never been to a dinner of that sort, and I expect to see some interesting things."

"Who is going to be there?" said Von Blumer to Scoop.

Scoop smiled. "All the boys," he replied. "A few of my friends in the advertising business—most of the club boys, have gotten up this little affair in my honor before my marriage. I had intended myself to give a bachelor supper, but when the news of my approaching wedding

came out, it seemed as if everybody I knew took it to heart, and so it is going to be more of an affair than I dreamed of. We may call upon you for a speech," he said to Von Blumer.

"Don't you do it. I'm a duffer at that sort of thing."

"You can't delude me that way. I have looked up your record. Two years ago at the Bankers' Banquet you made quite a hit."

After he had left them Von Blumer turned to Dimpleton. "That chap seems to know everything."

"It's his business. He not only knows everything, but everybody. The world is literally his oyster. There is no man but contains within him the possibilities for an advertisement, and Scoop never misses an opportunity."

"Tell me about this dinner. You know Scoop better than I do."

"As I understand it," replied Dimpleton, "the dinner is to be given by the Brass Club, an organization composed almost exclusively of advertising men, who, at present, as you know, dominate the literary destinies of the country. The editors, indeed, are such a weakly and altogether inconsequential set that they don't

even boast of a club exclusively for themselves. And so the advertising men, who represent the real talent, whenever they give a dinner always invite the editors to be present."

"I suppose," replied Von Blumer, laughingly, "in order that the editors may get a few ideas. This thing is all quite new to me, and I shall be interested in going.

"The idea is," he continued, "to advertise Scoop as much as possible.

"Well, no," replied Dimpleton, "not quite that. Of course no advertising man misses an opportunity, even when it comes to matrimony. But this is a case of good-fellowship, mixed with business. Scoop is going to be married. This furnishes a splendid excuse for a dinner. Almost any excuse for a dinner during the dinner-giving season is good, especially when it affords the boys an opportunity to make speeches, and 'work up trade,' as they say."

On the morning of the day in which the dinner was to be given, Von Blumer came downstairs to breakfast with his dress-suit case in his hand.

"I forgot to tell you, my dear, that I am going to a dinner to-night."

Charlotte looked at him in some astonishment.

"Didn't you know," she replied, "that to-night is the night of our anniversary?"

"So it is. We shall have to postpone it, inasmuch as the dinner can't be put off."

"Well, that's a cool proceeding on your part!"

"Why, you don't mind, do you?" he replied. "I didn't suppose it made any difference to you, since we both of us are independent, you know. You haven't forgotten that, have you?"

Charlotte's lips came together. "Not at all," she replied, coldly. "Go to your dinner. Do you expect to be home this evening?"

"I hope to be here on the one o'clock train."

He kissed her good-by, and hurried off to town.

At noon Major Buddway dropped in. "You are going to that dinner to-night, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes. Scoop was good enough to ask me. Are you?"

The Major smiled. "I certainly am," he replied. "I wouldn't miss it for anything."

"It seems rather strange," he continued,

"that I should so soon be Scoop's son-in-law, doesn't it?"

"Yes! I hadn't thought about that. So it does. He's younger than you, isn't he?"

The Major thoughtfully puffed his cigar. "In years, yes," he replied.

"I meant that, of course. I don't know anyone younger than you in spirit—except my son, Bobby, and he seems older at times."

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied the Major. "After all, what does it matter? These little incongruities of age have always seemed to me to be not worth while thinking about. Shall we go to the dinner together?"

"Certainly. Dimpleton is to meet me."

XXIII

IN WHICH VON BLUMER MAKES A SPEECH WITH IMPORTANT RESULTS

AT eight o'clock that evening the three men entered the rooms of the Brass Club. This club was an organization which had taken the entire floor of a large office-building and had fitted it up to suit their own purposes. There was a dining-room, a café, card-rooms, and a library which consisted principally of the files of magazines which were presided over by the leading spirits who belonged to the club.

On those occasions when public dinners were given—and they were given as often as possible during the season—the dining-room was made over. At one end of it was set a table in the form of a Maltese cross. This was the guest table. Scattered throughout the room were numbers of small tables where sat the members of the club, and after dinner they lis-

tened to speeches made from the Maltese cross.

It happened, as a rule, that some member of the club—for this organization, in its membership, spread out its tentacles into the artistic, literary and business world—that some member of the club usually furnished suitable decorations, consisting of original pictures loaned for the purpose of embellishment.

As Von Blumer and his friends entered, groups of men were standing and sitting about, talking vociferously, or smoking, or drinking that atrocious precursor to American volubility, the universal cocktail.

Scoop saw them in the distance, and hurried forward to welcome them.

"Your places," he said, "are at the centre table." He indicated the Maltese cross. "Better get seated, as the fun is soon going to begin."

Almost before they had time to reply, there was a homogeneous movement in one direction, the signal having been given for dinner.

Waiters began hurrying about and, amid the scraping of chairs and the confused murmur of masculine voices, everybody sat down. The menu was a simple affair, it being quite unim-

portant compared with the proceedings. The most that could be said of it was that it was the antithesis of what is known as home-cooking. There was wine for those who cared to drink it, but, alas! the days of Bohemia had long since passed; those days when sharp young literary blades with ambitions that almost matched their thirst were wont to seat themselves in cellars and imbibe what was technically known as "red ink." In their wake had come what is known as the advertising manager, calm when on the trail of copy, with an appetite well within control, so that most of these gentlemen who had gathered together to do the greatest among them honor were satisfied with a touch of whiskey and water, or an occasional sip of champagne.

It became evident as the dinner progressed that among that small group at the Maltese cross, known as the speakers, there was not that unconstrained sense of freedom which the main body of the guests betrayed. They were plainly nervous, for was it not their function to amuse the others?

The awful moment at last arrived. The toastmaster arose solemnly from the circle at the speakers' table and, forcing his words as best

he could through the fog of tobacco smoke, he opened the festivities. Scoop was the burden of his lay. He recalled, with much eloquence, that gentleman's achievements in the advertising world. He predicted a future even more roseate than his glorious past. After he had finished his panegyric over Scoop, he wound up by saying that his audience would, no doubt, be delighted to know that Mr. Joel Hackett, a rising young American humorist, would now address them.

Von Blumer had never before met a professional humorist. To see one face to face, even as it were darkly through the tobacco smoke, was, in itself, a new sensation. To hear him speak, promised even to be a greater one.

Mr. Hackett, indeed, had already had a brilliant career. He had begun as a paragrapher on a remote Western paper. The editors of other papers had noticed his paragraphs, and had done him the service to copy them. In a short time Mr. Hackett, by a stroke of luck, had turned off a poem which had gone the rounds of the press. This enabled him to move eastward toward the metropolis, and, by a clever combination of advertising, writing and humorous literature, he had gradually become

nown. A series of lectures was his next suc-
ɛssful move, until now his presence at the
ɔeakers' table was considered by many an ab-
ɔlute necessity, and by none more so than by
Ir. Hackett himself.

It was perfectly evident, from the expression
f his face, which was suffused with a saturnine
ɔlemnity, that this gentleman intended to be
unny, and that, even if he had any other ob-
ect in view, everybody else in the audience
ıtended he should be funny. There seemed
o be no escape for his mind, even had there
ɐen such a desire upon his part. As a matter
ɟf fact, Mr. Hackett had just published a book,
.nd it had been urged upon him that this was
. fit moment to make a telling speech, the re-
ɔorts of which, in conjunction with the book
eviews, would be of great service in promot-
ng the sales.

Some minds more timid than Hackett's
vould, no doubt, have quailed at this possibil-
ty, but he was equal to the emergency and evi-
lently determined not only to give as much
uality as possible, but quantity.

He modestly referred to himself as a person
ıot worth consideration, thereby implying that
ıe was, which led him to tell a story. The ef-

fect of this story on the audience was peculiar. In some quarters, where it had not been heard, the laughter was loud and long; in others there was a silence. If a canvass had been made of the audience, the probability is that those who had heard the story and those who had not were equally divided.

When Hackett sat down there was long applause. He was followed by an artist, who drew lightning pictures and talked about himself. Then the toastmaster called upon Hackett again. And so it went on. When things began to sober down, Hackett was called upon until that weary moment came toward the end of the dinner when even the audience, American as it was, grew tired of the speeches.

At this moment the toastmaster arose and said: "We have among us this evening a gentleman who is a close friend and neighbor of Mr. Scoop. I have no that this gentleman can give us some tion about the habits of our friend w this evening. delight to honor." (T "delight t honor" w gaspin th.) "Gen tlemen, I asure i cing you t Mr. Henr lumer, ale."

Von Bl : "C I am

much a stranger to you all and so little acquainted with American literature and its twin sister, advertising (applause), that I feel it is best for me, from the start, to ignore those subjects which I do not understand, and confine myself more to the one which I think I do.

"I shall, therefore, speak to you this evening on the text, 'Matrimony and the Independence of Man,' and it seems to me it is a fitting text, in view of the marriage of my dear friend, Scoop. It is only since I have known him that I have gathered inklings of that great and stirring world of American literary enterprise whose representatives are now gathered before me.

"The first thing which attracted my attention was the predominance, in this world, of women. Indeed, Mr. Scoop, on one occasion in his brilliant way, enlightened me on the difference between the true literary woman and the spurious. It is not necessary for me to enlarge upon is phase of a most interesting subject. I ply desire to call your attention to the growdependence vomen, not only of single but of t who are happily married. if I m ge from my own obser- I exp it seems to me that the

independence of man is not moving forward with that same impetus which it deserves.

"The fact is, gentlemen, that all the talent in the country, as I gather from this evening among you, is gradually being monopolized by the advertising men, and all those others who are compelled, by the stress of business, to toil for a living are so dependent upon the dull commonplaces of everyday business that they have no time to develop themselves properly. The result is, gentlemen, that women are gradually supplanting us in almost every avenue. It is almost impossible to take up a copy of any magazine without seeing an array of women contributors far in excess of those of the men.

"Now, gentlemen, you still possess a power. It is through you that the ideas permeate to the remotest sections of this country. Many of you, I know, are husbands and fathers. Let us stand together. Let us proclaim henceforth and forever the growing independence of man!"

This is only a part of what Von Blumer said. When he first began, the audience was sleepy, but as he went on with his persuasive manner everybody was fully aroused. The un-

expectedness of his subject and the earnestness with which he enforced it went straight home. When the dinner had finally broken up, numbers of men crowded around to congratulate him, and it was only with some difficulty that Buddway and Dimpleton succeeded in getting him away.

The Major was now living at Tiverdale, having secured temporary quarters not too remote from the object of his devotions.

"Come," he exclaimed to Von Blumer, "we have just got time to take the one o'clock train!"

Von Blumer hesitated. "I don't think I'll go out home to-night."

"What?" said the Major. "You don't mean you are going to stay in town?"

"Yes; I'm going to follow my own advice. I am going to be as independent as I please." And, in spite of everything Dimpleton and the Major could say, he bade them good-night as they hurried off to the train.

The next morning, at the breakfast-table in the hotel where he was staying, he picked up the morning papers. To his surprise and amazement, he found that not only the proceedings of the Brass Club were mentioned, but

that his speech proclaiming the independence of man was given a prominent place. It was true that it was cut and garbled, but enough of it remained to make what, to him, who never before had seen himself in print, was a startling showing.

That afternoon, just before dinner, as he entered his home, no wife came downstairs to greet him. All was silent, except for Bobby's voice, which, in the distance, could be heard calling loudly for his bread and milk. He stole upstairs to the library.

Mrs. Von Blumer was sitting at her desk.

He went up and kissed her.

No response.

"Well," he said, "my dear, you don't seem to be filled with an overpowering joy to see me."

"Why should I be?"

"I thought it might give you some pleasure to have me home again."

Charlotte's voice quavered.

"I don't know," she said, "whether it matters to me." Then she turned on him suddenly and fiercely.

"What do you mean by making such a speech as you did last night?"

"I did it as a matter of pride."

"Pride?"

"Yes. You know you have been branching out into a world of art and letters. The only reason that your speech on 'Relaxation' wasn't reported in full all over the country was because the papers were not fully alive to the sleeping genius of Tiverdale—that is to say, yourself.

"I felt that it was incumbent upon me to keep up my end. You see, my dear, one of the days when you were out at a late afternoon session of the Woman's Club, in the most innocent manner possible I happened to pick up a typewritten copy of your great lecture. And, while it was called 'Relaxation,' the subject was really the 'Independence of Woman.' I felt, therefore, that, in order to be on an equal basis with you, I ought to present the 'Independence of Man.' "

"Well, you have done it all right. I don't suppose I shall ever hear the last of this."

"Nonsense!"

Charlotte, at this, burst into tears. "I hate you!" she cried. "I don't ever want to see you again."

He went over and tried to put his arms about her. But she pushed him away.

"Don't speak to me! Don't come near me!"

It was the first time in their married life that such a thing had happened. Von Blumer was beside himself. He went downstairs, put on his hat and started to walk down the street, to think it over.

What had he done?

To his simple mind he had really done only what his wife had said that he might do, inasmuch as she was doing it herself. The worst of it was that there was nobody he could appeal to to decide the matter for him. It wasn't a matter he could talk about. He felt, somehow or other, that he had made a fool of himself at the club the night before, and yet—logically speaking—he couldn't see that he had done any more than Charlotte had done.

It seemed impossible for any hope of reconciliation. In a dim kind of way he felt that he was right. He felt that he was right in asking Charlotte to keep within her own domestic bounds; and then, when she refused to do this, that he himself might do as he pleased; and yet, somehow or other, when the thing was put into practice, the result was a

good deal of unhappiness. He had been unhappy when she had proclaimed her independence, and now that he had proclaimed his he was unhappier than ever.

He walked down along the street and across the railroad track to the field beyond. So absorbed was he that he did not hear footsteps behind him. A hand was laid on his shoulder. A voice spoke. It was Major Buddway's.

"Well, my boy, what are you strolling around here for?"

The Major's keen eyes looked him over. "I guess I know," he said. "The speech that you made last night raised the devil in home circles, didn't it?"

"Well, I should say it did," replied Von Blumer, glad to have a confidant. "Charlotte was madder than a hornet. And the funny thing is that there's no reason why she should be, because she did practically the same thing at the Woman's Club. She made a speech proclaiming the independence of woman, and all I did was to follow her example."

"Weren't you mad when you heard what she had been doing?"

"Yes."

"You made up your mind to get even?"

"Yes."

"And you did get even?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is where you made a mistake." The Major put his arm caressingly around that of his friend.

"My boy," he said, "never, under any circumstances, try to get even with your wife!"

XXIV

IN WHICH IT IS CONCLUSIVELY AND FINALLY PROVEN THAT THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE SOMETIMES RUNS SMOOTH

THE next day was Sunday, a day in which all hard-working Americans balance up their minds, prepared to start afresh.

Under ordinary circumstances it was most welcome to the Von Blumers. But, in their present unhappy situation, it served, if anything, only to emphasize their discord.

It is not for this historian to say which of them was right. Doubtless, there are many sympathetic gentlemen who will side with Von Blumer and whose sense of justice at the perusal of his hopeless condition will be keenly stirred, while certain ladies with well-defined enthusiasm as to right and wrong will become convinced not only of Mrs. Von Blumer's in-

nocence, but of her absolute right to go the way she had chosen.

Much may be said on both sides. It is probable, however, that any opinion would not be entirely correct. Human nature is variable. It has impulses and counter-impulses, and while we have elaborated countless philosophies reeking with system, none of them has yet been able to guide the way among matrimonial labyrinths.

The author has no doubt that, in this distressing state of affairs, things might have gone on indefinitely, and both Von Blumer and his wife have remained in that condition to which our friend, Schopenhauer, has referred in his metaphor of the porcupines—neither of them, by necessity, being enabled to live too far away from each other, and yet certain unalterable differences preventing them from getting too close.

There was, however, another person to be considered—a person who could not very long be left out of account.

For, under the stress of the strained relationship existing in the Von Blumer household, Jerry was becoming restless. Whether it was lack of exercise, or whether the general gloom

had also cast its pall over his spirit, he was a changed animal.

And as, in the distance, the Reverend Dr. Boulten and the Reverend Dr. Qualter were just opening up their services; as Major Buddway, in a secluded glen on the other side of the golf links, was pressing the hand of his fair fiancée, and as Scoop, on the Willoby piazza, was talking sweet nothings to his fair one, Jerry whinnied mournfully to himself.

And Von Blumer, smoking disconsolately on his piazza, heard the sound and went out to him.

It is said, once upon a time, Iobates having sent Bellerophon to fight with the Chimera, that the latter was puzzled how to proceed; until, finally, seeking the soothsayer, Polyidus, the latter advised him to secure the horse, Pegasus, and instructed him, in order to do this, that he must pass the night in the Temple of Minerva. When he awoke, he discovered in his hand a golden bridle. At the sight of this bridle, Pegasus came forward, Bellerophon mounted upon his back, and was victorious over the Chimera.

The Greeks were wise in selecting an animal with so many lovable attributes to accomplish

so much that was good, and Von Blumer, unconsciously, in his struggle against those Chimeras that seem to have taken possession of his disordered mind, was also fortunate in going to the same source. For was it not true that Jerry, in addition to his other attributes, had always seemed to have that quality of bringing people together, from the time that he had first started out on his career in Hen' Beebe's stable in Swantown, where he had gotten his training, up to the present?

For days Jerry had been neglected. There seemed to have been no occasion to take him out. Von Blumer opened the stable-door and, like Bellerophon of old, put his hand upon the bridle. The benevolent horse looked at him reproachfully out of his mellow eyes.

"Jerry," said Von Blumer, "you old fool, what's the matter with you this morning?"

"There's matter enough," replied Jerry. "Don't you know that I haven't been out for days, and don't you suppose I know what the matter is? It is you who are the fool. What business have you, I should like to know, to quarrel with your dear wife, one of the best and most lovable women I have ever known—and I speak from experience?"

"Well," replied Von Blumer, testily, "it was her fault. I have some rights, haven't I?"

Jerry looked at him pityingly. "The trouble with you is," he said, "that you reason too much and don't love and trust enough. If you had trusted Charlotte as you should have done, there would have been no question between you. You chose to doubt her, and when you began to doubt, you began to reason."

"Then I suppose it is all my fault. Don't you know that Charlotte's deliberately neglecting her duty?"

There was upon Jerry's face an expression of deep amusement. "It isn't true!" he snorted. "Why don't you give her the benefit of the doubt? Instead of accusing your wife of being the cause of the trouble, why have you not stepped forward with your love and sympathy? You poor, little, weak man! Why don't you have faith? Why don't you put aside your feeble reason, and obey your good impulses and ask to be forgiven?"

"For what?" replied Von Blumer.

"For everything you've done."

"But if I do I will acknowledge myself beaten. I have some pride!"

"Yes," said Jerry. "You have so much pride

that you will permit a sweet woman to suffer just because you haven't courage enough to admit your own imperfections."

"But tell me what I have done!"

"Suppose you ask her to tell you. It is enough to know that you have not loved and trusted her. Do you suppose that she is deliberately going to pursue a course which will make you both unhappy all the rest of your lives? I don't believe it! There's something wrong somewhere. Only, if you are half a man, you will find out. Obey your impulses, and in the meantime—give me a few oats."

Von Blumer did as he was told, in deep thought. Then he came up and put his arm over the old horse's neck.

"Jerry," he said, "you are a wonder. You certainly have a great gift. I'll do it."

He went back into the house. Charlotte was at her desk. She held a pen in her hand and was looking abstractedly out of the window as he came in. For an instant he wavered, her attitude was so aggressive. He started back out of the room.

But the thought of Jerry sustained him. How could he go back and face that inscrutable animal and tell the story of his own failure? And

so, with a mighty effort, he summoned the halting words.

"Dearest," he stammered, "I was wrong. I have been a fool. I haven't treated you right. I have had all kinds of mean, nasty, contemptible thoughts about you. I went away on the night of our anniversary just because I wanted to show you how independent I could be. But the fact is, that I realize now that I can't be independent. I'm too dependent upon you. I suppose it is a humiliating thing for me to say, but I can't help it. Will you forgive me?"

Charlotte put down her pen and moved toward him.

"Don't!" she said. "I don't want you to say that. It was my fault. I know I was horrid. But"—she leaned over and put her arms about him—"you know, dear, you didn't trust me. You thought that I wanted to be president of the Woman's Club."

"Didn't you?"

"No! I just longed to tell you how it happened. I needed you so much after that awful time I had. I wanted somebody to advise me. And then, just at the moment when I felt that you, of all people, could tell me what to do, you

didn't wait, but you accused me of all kinds of awful things."

"But you mean to say that you didn't really intend to branch out? You said you did. You talked as if you were enthusiastic about a career, and all that sort of tommyrot."

"But you remember that I only did that after you made me angry. It was because you forced me into it. I said to myself: 'If he really believes me capable of being such a woman, then I will be one.' "

"But, my dear, you were actually elected."

"Yes. You see, it was this way. They asked me to read a paper, and I just sat down and wrote what I thought to be a poor enough thing, but it was a simple, common-sense idea of how to rest, which I learned from my mother. And I suppose that because it wasn't even literary, but was short and understandable, that they seemed to like it so well."

"I can imagine that," said Von Blumer. "It probably took them by surprise."

"Well, it seems that nobody wanted the position of president—I found that out afterward. You see, the best women are so busy with other things that they haven't the time to do that—and so, Mrs. Willoby having sent in her resig-

nation, they elected me unanimously, right on top of my paper, before I had even time to get my breath. And when I came home I was in absolute despair. I saw that, in order to do justice to this thing, I would simply have to neglect something at home. I realized that I had been taken advantage of, which made me madder still. I was writing a withdrawal of my acceptance as president just at the moment when you came in. You couldn't wait. You were so impatient to show me how mad you were! Of course, this only roused my pride and made me answer you back.

"And then, to cap the climax, you went away to that horrid dinner, and you made that awful speech."

Von Blumer got up and paced the floor.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Is there anybody on the face of the earth that is as bad as I am? Why, I am a monster!"

"You are nothing of the sort. You didn't mean it, and I have no doubt that I aggravated you awfully."

"Well, there's only one thing to be done. I shall have to hitch up Jerry, and we must go out and take a ride."

He went over, and put his arms about her.

"Dearest," he said, "we're both human. We're different. Perhaps we don't understand each other always. But we will always be lovers, won't we?"

Her head dropped on his shoulder.

"Always," she replied.

AFTERWARDS

ONE year later, on the glass-enclosed piazza of Major Buddway's new home in Tiverdale, three men sat smoking.

It had been a great year for Tiverdale. It had begun with a double-wedding.

And during the last week there had been so much excitement in certain households that even masculine confidences had, of necessity, been suspended.

Scoop was the first to speak. He turned to Von Blumer.

"I've been so busy myself," he said, "that I haven't had time to ask you. Tell me, old man, what is it—a boy or a girl?"

Von Blumer smiled.

"A girl," he said. "And yours, my friend?"

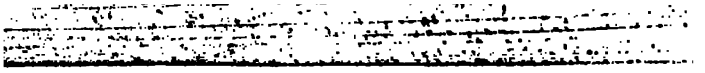
Scoop answered Von Blumer's smile in kind.

"You ought to have had a girl," he said. "Your first was a boy. I'm glad to say mine is a boy."

Then both of them turned, moved by a common impulse, to the Major.

"Major," said Von Blumer, "how is it with you?"

Major Buddway's ample figure settled back placidly in his huge arm-chair. His massive chest rose with ineffable satisfaction. He raised his glass so that the rays of the morning sun gleamed gloriously through its amber depths.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is the proudest and happiest moment of my life. It's twins!"

THE END